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”Always be hopeful, don’t be hopeless”: From oppression to emancipation  
through praxis and participatory action research

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**Thesis abstract**

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Title "Always be hopeful, don't be hopeless": From oppression to emancipation through praxis and participatory action research			
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This Master's thesis considers the imbalanced power relations that concern the oppressed people in the world as well as redressing those power relations. With this thesis we wish to raise awareness of oppression, and to contribute to the on-going theoretical discussion on how that oppression can be overcome. In this thesis we attempt to raise the question of what the relationship between power, empowerment, and emancipation is, and how these concepts can be taken to an empirical level with praxis and participatory action research (PAR). The research is based on our Bachelor's thesis (Petrelius &amp; Pihlajamaa, 2011), which discussed the concept of empowerment through a case study, and it aims at deepening our previous understandings. As this thesis is strongly related to and repeatedly refers to the interpretations and preconceptions formed in our previous study, we have chosen to utilise the hermeneutic research approach. In line with the hermeneutic circle, we have come to acknowledge that our research findings are never complete, but the examination of the key concepts is an on-going process.</p> <p>We conclude that power is omnipresent, and in fact penetrates all of the concepts we have considered in this thesis, affecting their relations. Furthermore, empowerment and emancipation are closely linked terms that we differentiate by stating that while empowerment, i.e. finding one's self-worth within the system, is a valuable goal, it is not enough in the context of this thesis, but that something more all-encompassing is required. We find emancipation to suit the purposes of our research better than empowerment, and thus focus on how emancipation and especially emancipatory research could be conducted within oppressed communities. However, we still see empowerment as an essential part of the emancipatory process, which is why it is inseparably linked to emancipation. Furthermore, in this thesis we propose that praxis and PAR can potentially provide meaningful ways of taking the aforementioned theories to a practical level. Praxis, the union of action and reflection, is found in the core of participatory action research, as the entire concept of PAR is based on honest dialogue between the research participants as well as on the seamless collaboration of theory and practice. In other words, PAR provides a platform for exercising praxis. PAR is essentially an emancipatory process, but the initiation of PAR already shows signs of emancipatory movement within the community, which is why we argue that the two reinforce each other.</p>			
Keywords    empowerment, emancipation, hermeneutics, participatory action research, power, praxis			



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Tiivistelmä  Tämä pro gradu -työ on perehtynyt sorrettuja ihmisiä koskeviin epätasapainoisiin valtasuhteisiin ja niiden korjaamiseen. Tutkielman kautta haluamme kasvattaa tietoisuutta sorrettujen ihmisten tilanteesta sekä osallistua sortamisen nujertamiseen liittyvään teoreettiseen keskusteluun. Tämä tutkielma esittää kysymyksen vallan, voimaantumisen ja emansipaation välisestä suhteesta, sekä pyrkii selvittämään kuinka edellä mainitut käsitteet voidaan toteuttaa empiirisellä tasolla praksiksen ja osallistavan toimintatutkimuksen kautta. Tutkimus perustuu aiempaan kandidaatin tutkielmaan (Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011), jossa voimaantumisen käsitettä on tutkittu tapatutkimuksen kautta. Pro gradu -työssä pyritäänkin syventämään aiemmin tutkittujen käsitteiden ymmärrystä. Tutkielma hyödyntää hermeneuttista tutkimusmenetelmää, sillä se on vahvasti kytköksissä aiemmin muodostamiimme tulkintoihin ja käsityksiin, joihin tutkimuksessa myös toistuvasti viitataan. Hermeneuttisen syklin mukaisesti tutkielmassa on huomioitu, että käsitteiden tulkitseminen ja muodostaminen on päättymätön prosessi, jonka takia tutkimustulosten ei voida sanoa olevan lopullisia.  Olemme tulleet tutkimukssamme siihen johtopäätökseen, että valta on läsnä kaikkialla ja lävistää kaikki käsitteet, joita olemme tutkineet vaikuttaen niiden välisiin suhteisiin. Voimaantuminen ja emansipaatio ovat toisiinsa läheisesti liittyviä käsitteitä, jotka erotamme toisistaan havainnollistamalla kuinka voimaantuminen eli oman arvonsa ymmärtäminen vallitsevan yhteiskunnan puitteissa on itsessään arvokas tavoite, mutta valitettavan puutteellinen tämän tutkimuksen tarpeita ajatellen. Siksi olemme voimaantumisen sijaan kääntäneet katseemme kohti emansipaatiota ja keskitymme tutkimaan miten emansipaatiota ja etenkin emansipatorista tutkimusta voidaan toteuttaa sorrettujen yhteisöiden keskuudessa. Näemme voimaantumisen tärkeänä osana emansipatorista prosessia ja tästä syystä voimaantuminen käsitteenä onkin erottamattomasti sidoksissa emansipaatioon. Lisäksi ehdotamme, että praksis ja osallistava toimintatutkimus ovat potentiaalisesti merkityksellisiä keinoja viedä edellä mainitut käsitteet empiiriselle tasolle. Praxis eli toiminnan ja reflektion yhteensulautuma on osallistavan toimintatutkimuksen ytimessä sillä osallistava toimintatutkimus perustuu niin rehelliselle dialogille tutkimukseen osallistuvien tahojen välillä kuin myös teorian ja käytännön saumattomaan yhteistyöhön. Toisin sanoen osallistava toimintatutkimus toimii alustana praksiksen harjoittamiselle. Osallistava toimintatutkimus on luonteeltaan emansipatorinen prosessi, mutta jo kyseisen tutkimusprosessin aloittaminen on merkki emansipatorisesta kehityksestä yhteisön sisällä. Siksi olemmekin sitä mieltä, että emansipaatio ja osallistava toimintatutkimus ilmiöinä vahvistavat toisiaan.			
Asiasanat    emansipaatio, hermeneutiikka, osallistava toimintatutkimus, praksis, valta, voimaantuminen			

*”...looking at the past must only be a means  
of understanding more clearly what and who they are  
so that they can more wisely build the future.”*

*- Paulo Freire (1996, p. 65)*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Always be hopeful, don’t be hopeless.” (Yui, aged 15)

“Because I want to see their good future.” (Fon, aged 16)

(Children’s Organization of South-East Asia, 2013)

These two quotes above are taken from short essays written by two of the girls who have been a source of inspiration for the research presented in this thesis. As will be explained later, these girls were born to families that belong to an oppressed group of people, which presents a great deal of challenges and injustice to the girls’ daily lives as well as to their futures. This piece of research is a Master’s thesis which is concerned with the situation of the oppressed peoples in the world. It has been inspired by our personal experiences working with a group of discriminated girls, as well as by scholars such as Paulo Freire, Jürgen Habermas, and Orlando Fals Borda, who have contributed to the discussion on the attempts of the oppressed to pursue social change. Consequently, in this thesis we will examine the relationship between power, empowerment and emancipation in the context of the oppressed and their quest for changing their oppressive realities. We will embark upon the research by first analysing the concept of power, which is connected to both empowerment and emancipation, as well as to all human action in general. Through a careful analysis on power we can begin to understand the complexity of and the difference between the two concepts. After discussing and defining power, empowerment, and emancipation, we will continue by proposing that the aforementioned theories can be taken from mere theorising to practice by exercising praxis through participatory action research.

The nature of this thesis is mainly of a theoretical inquiry and therefore the methodological approach chosen for the thesis is hermeneutics. A more detailed account of the chosen methodology will be provided in Chapter 2, but what is important to remark here is that this thesis follows the hermeneutic tradition of analysing, re-analysing, and interpreting

new theories and knowledge based on our previous forestructures and preconceptions. Thus, while discussing the relationship between power, empowerment and emancipation, we intend to illuminate the hermeneutic circle by portraying our learning process, namely the journey of our research which began from analysing the empirical data in our Bachelor's thesis (Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011) and has now taken a turn towards a more detailed theoretical examination of the concepts relating to the topic of our research. The motivation behind this research in fact originates in our Bachelor's thesis: in the unanswered questions and open ends concerning empowerment that we were left contemplating on after writing the thesis. Consequently, we felt the need to study the concept of empowerment more thoroughly and explore if empowerment, after all, was the theoretical framework we intended to propose for the oppressed to follow.

Although for the purposes of exemplifying we have included the case of a certain oppressed group, namely the Thai hill tribes, into this thesis, we intend to remain on a rather general level on theorising and are not determined to propose a plan for action for any specific group of people. Rather, with this thesis we wish to participate in the theoretical debate concerning the efforts made by the oppressed towards establishing a societal order that is based on justice, as well as to promote discussion and awareness on the situation of the oppressed groups of people in the world, while not forgetting involve the oppressed themselves into the discourse.

### **1.1. The research questions**

As explained earlier, in this thesis we intend to deepen our understanding of empowerment, as well as to introduce discussion on power and emancipation in order to broaden our horizons on the theories relating to the attempt to redress imbalanced power relations. Additionally, we will explore the possibilities provided by praxis as well as participatory action research, a platform for practising praxis, in reaching for emancipation from oppression. Consequently, the main research question addressed in this thesis is

What is the relationship between power, empowerment and emancipation, and how can these concepts be taken to an empirical level with praxis and participatory action research?



Based on the main research question, we have also formed five sub-questions which will contribute to examining and answering of the main question. The sub-questions are the following:

- How can power be defined?
- How can empowerment be defined?
- How can emancipation be defined?
- What is praxis, and how is it defined according to the Freirean view?
- What is PAR and to what extent can its standard framework be generalised?

## 1.2. Reoccurring concepts

There are two terms that need to be explained before we embark upon the research itself, namely *oppression* and *social change*. Considering the focus point and breadth of this thesis, it is neither our intention nor meaningful to go deep into defining and analysing these concepts, as one could most likely write a whole thesis solely on each of the terms. Although oppression and social change are unquestionably very closely linked to the topic of this research, we have chosen to direct the emphasis of the theoretical inquiry to the theories of power, empowerment, and emancipation, as well as to those of praxis and participatory action research. However, as the two terms occur repeatedly in the text, it is necessary to explain what we mean by them. While we claim that contenting ourselves with rather ambiguous descriptions of oppression and social change sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, we will nevertheless base the brief descriptions on the literature that is more extensively referred to elsewhere in this study, instead of simply defining the two terms ourselves.

In terms of *oppression*, we have adopted the Freirean view of the concept, which indicates that the oppressed suffer from unbalanced distribution of power in a society, and have

therefore been placed in a marginalised position with few or no opportunities to voice their views and concerns. Additionally, in some extreme cases the oppressed are discriminated by e.g. not being granted a citizenship of the state of their residence, or by denial of access to basic human rights, such as health care and education. According to Freire (1996, pp. 25-26), this sort of dehumanisation is a key element in the unjust order of oppression. As the opposite of humanisation, dehumanisation is objecting people's vocation of becoming fully human by the means of exploitation, injustice, violence, and oppression. In this thesis, the terms *discrimination* and *marginalisation* will be used more or less as synonyms of oppression, as they quite accurately characterise the situation of the oppressed.

Another other term that requires definition is *social change*; a term we have come to understand through emancipation, and something that in this thesis will principally be used as a synonym for emancipation. In critical theory, emancipation and social change have always been a logical goal that has been at the heart of visions such as democratisation and decolonisation (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, pp. 197-198). Moreover, what is important to consider when discussing social change is the fact that while a state should be obligated to protect the interests of all its residents, there should be meaningful suggestions as to a better social order behind movements striving for social change; blind action will only create another kind of oppressive society with different oppressors (Ilting, 1972, pp. 97-104; Suter, 1972, p. 55). Closely linked to the term social change are two other terms, namely social justice and democracy. We believe social justice to be the ultimate goal of social change and emancipation; something one strives for and in order to achieve it, social change and emancipation is required. In this thesis, the term democracy is used in a way that portrays it in a positive light, as a desirable outcome of emancipatory actions and a favourable social structure. However, we fully recognise the Western-centeredness of the term as well as its complexity and feel the need to stress that democracy is by no means a perfect way of organising a society. Like oppression and social change, democracy is also a big term that would be a topic for another thesis altogether. For the purposes of this thesis, however, we have chosen to use a rather straightforward take on democracy in order to maintain the focus on our main concepts.

### 1.3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis can be argued to be somewhat deviant from the so-called traditionally constructed Master's theses written in the Faculty of Education at the University of Oulu in the sense that this thesis is mainly theoretical and therefore it does not include clearly separable theoretical and empirical parts. In other words, this thesis does not follow the 'traditional' thesis structure with first presenting the theoretical framework followed by explanations of the methodology, and finally moving to the data analysis. Instead, consequent to its theoretical and hermeneutical nature, the thesis begins with the methodological part which briefly describes the entire research process, beginning some years before the thesis work itself and stretching beyond finishing the thesis, and relates the hermeneutic research approach to the process. This will be done in Chapter 2.

What follows is the interpretations and analysis of the research data, the data being the theories considered in this thesis as well as our previous conceptions related to combating oppression which we have previously presented in our Bachelor's thesis (Petrelus & Pihlajamaa, 2011). Accordingly, in the beginning of the Chapter 3, 'From previous knowledge towards new theories', we will shortly present the case of the hill tribes, which was thoroughly examined in our Bachelor's thesis, in order to illustrate the discussion that follows in the rest of the chapter. In fact, Chapter 3 mainly concentrates on deepening our understanding on theories of power, empowerment and emancipation, and how they relate to each other, while at the same time demonstrating how our understanding and the way of thinking about the concepts has adjusted and developed, broadened even, along the lines of the hermeneutic circle from the Bachelor's thesis to the point of writing this Master's thesis.

In Chapter 4, titled 'From theory to social change', we will continue by suggesting that emancipating oneself from oppression requires *praxis*, namely action and reflection, and that participatory action research (PAR) can potentially provide a way to bring the previously discussed theories alive by providing a practical approach to empowerment, emancipation and the redressing of unbalanced power relations. In Chapter 5, we once

again refer back to the principles of hermeneutics and contemplate on the reliability, validity and ethicality of the research, and finally in Chapter 6, we will conclude what was discovered and learned throughout the whole research process, and portray how our preconceptions have changed as we have gained more knowledge about the subject, as well as take a look into the future of continuous learning.

## **2. THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

This thesis is a qualitative inquiry in which we have chosen to utilise the hermeneutic research approach. In this chapter we will discuss the decision of acquiring hermeneutics as the prevailing methodology of this thesis, and depict how the hermeneutic circle relates to our research design. As the nature of this research is hermeneutic and therefore focuses on re-interpreting and re-analysing our previous perceptions, we find it important to describe the entire research process beginning from our teaching practice experience in Northern Thailand, working with the girls of hill tribe origins, and the Bachelor's thesis we wrote based on the experience, leading all the way to the point of writing and finishing this Master's thesis. This thesis in fact includes quotes from our Bachelor's thesis with which we intend to illustrate how our understanding has changed throughout the research process and how we have descended the hermeneutic circle and delved deeper into the world of empowerment and emancipation.

### **2.1. Hermeneutics as the research methodology**

As said before, the aim of this thesis is to deepen our understanding of the theories of power, empowerment and emancipation, and explore the possibilities provided by praxis and participatory action research in overcoming oppression and unbalanced power relations. Based on the starting point of the study, it would seem apparent that the nature of the research is of a qualitative one since it would prove to be impossible to reach a conclusion answering the research questions by quantitative data analysis methods. Indeed, Creswell (2007, pp. 39-40) recommends a qualitative approach for a research in which the intention is to explore the topic throughout the course of the research and analyse it by qualitative means, rather than measure it quantitatively. Moreover, Creswell (2007, p. 40) advises researchers to conduct qualitative research when they want to “empower individuals to share their stories” or to “hear silenced voices”, which indeed is the ultimate goal for this Master's thesis: understanding the broadness and versatility of the concepts of empowerment and emancipation, as well as examining the potential of praxis, and practising praxis through participatory action research as a tool in voicing the perspectives

of the oppressed. Therefore, as the purpose of this thesis is to explore and expand our perceptions of the abovementioned concepts, rather than measure them, we argue that the qualitative research methodology provides a suitable approach for this thesis.

There are numerous ways to approach and conduct a qualitative study. Creswell (2007), for instance, lists five different approaches to qualitative inquiry, and Patton (2002) refers to several other authors who have discussed alternative types of conducting a qualitative research. When designing this thesis, choosing among the vast number of approaches was guided by the overall research approach; by the long-lasting nature of the research process, which will be described in more detail later in this chapter, as well as the way that our learning process is openly described and employed in this Master's thesis. Additionally, the main research question as well as the sub-questions of this thesis, which encourage the researchers to explore, interpret and analyse the theories considered, were referred to when choosing the methodology to be applied. As the means for collecting data was narrowed down to reading and researching relevant literature and re-analysing the previously acquired knowledge and perceptions, instead of conducting surveys or interviews, the role of understanding and interpreting texts was highlighted even more. It was therefore decided that, because of its interpretative nature, hermeneutical approach would offer an appropriate method for data analysis in this thesis.

Hermeneutics as an approach focuses on what something means in relation to the cultural context it was first created in as well as to the cultural contexts within which it is being read and interpreted. Therefore, as certain theoretical perspectives, such as theories on empowerment and emancipation in this thesis, are adopted and adapted, it is done within various contexts that include not only cultural, but historical and scholarly aspects, too. Generally speaking, hermeneutics refers to the theory and practice of interpreting. In fact, the term hermeneutics originates from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which translates into English as *to understand* or *to interpret*. (Patton, 2002, pp. 113-114.) Hermeneutics is traditionally known as the study of the meaning and intent of the Bible. It has, however, evolved into interpreting written information in general, as well as understanding human practices, events and situations. Modern hermeneutic philosophy was first developed by Frederick Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when he discovered the

potential hermeneutics has in understanding human sciences. Schleiermacher proposed that researchers could develop an empathetic relationship with the text, which could be compared to the relationship between an understanding listener and a speaker conveying a message. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) expanded the use of hermeneutics for cultural systems and organisations, and he also began to emphasise the importance of taking the original context and purpose of the text into consideration. (Patton, 2002, p. 114; Von Zweck, 2008, p. 116-119.)

The philosopher Heidegger (1889-1976) took hermeneutics even further by arguing that hermeneutics has the potential to be more than a methodology for interpretation. Heidegger used hermeneutical phenomenology for representing how the meaning of being, i.e. *Dasein*, was understood. He also stated that it is impossible for a researcher to understand and be fully aware of the experiences of being as they had actually been lived by others because of the pre-understandings and forestructures that influence and guide the researcher's interpretation. Heidegger also introduced the circle of understanding by explaining that reaching an understanding of *Dasein* is a never-ending circular process, where a phenomenon is first presented in an ambiguous form combined with the past knowledge and experiences, which together shape a sort of a concept of the phenomenon. This understanding of the phenomenon then guides and enriches the concept forming of future experiences, creating a continuous circle that recurs indefinitely to generate further knowledge and comprehension. Heidegger's circle is also known as the hermeneutic circle (or cycle). (Patton, 2002, p. 114; Von Zweck, 2008, p. 116-119.)

Siljander (1998) explains the main principles of the *hermeneutic circle* by stating that there is no absolute beginning in the process of forming an understanding of a phenomenon, because all understanding is based on the previous knowledge—the pre-understandings—that one possesses. All the existing knowledge and preconceptions the interpreter already has, influences the understanding process of the new phenomenon. The spiral nature of the hermeneutic circle becomes clear when one understands that throughout the interpretation process an individual's pre-understanding of the phenomenon changes, and thus the interpretation and understanding processes go deeper and deeper in cycles; if no change happens, the interpreter will begin to go around the same loop without gaining deeper

knowledge about the phenomenon. Hence, when one learns more about the phenomenon, their conceptions change which in turn affects how they understand the further experiences of the phenomenon. (Siljander, 1998, pp. 115-116.)

Re-evaluating and re-developing one's starting point, the pre-understanding, therefore, explains why in hermeneutics the interpretations are said to be never complete. As hermeneutical approach has its cyclical character, it becomes clear that one's interpretations are never absolute (Patton, 2002, p. 115; Siljander, 1998, p. 117). Modern hermeneutics indeed challenges the 'traditional' positivist desire to reach the absolute truth, and consequently stresses the importance of an interpretation remaining, indeed, *an interpretation* within the context. Researchers using hermeneutic approach are in fact said to be more transparent about their role in the research by being "much clearer about the fact that they are *constructing* the 'reality' on the basis of their interpretations of data" (Patton, 2002, p. 115). It is therefore essential in hermeneutics that the researchers clearly declare their position and purposes (*ibid.*).

It is apparent that the nature of hermeneutics as a methodology is very subjective, and the results depend largely on the researchers' position. Eichelberger (1989, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 115) writes that

"If other researchers had different backgrounds, used different methods, or had different purposes, they would likely develop different types of reactions, focus on different aspects of the setting, and develop somewhat different scenarios."

The pre-understandings and forestructures, which Heidegger referred to, shape our interpretations as researchers and thus bring forward our own views and understandings of the phenomenon. Even though subjectivity is attempted to be diminished by considering the research topic from various perspectives, in hermeneutics it remains omnipresent: subjectivity cannot be avoided, because it is an essential part of hermeneutical approach. Our position as researchers will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on reliability, ethics and validity of the research.



To conclude, hermeneutics can be described as the praxis of understanding and interpreting, namely reflecting and acting upon the previously discovered and occupied paradigms. As a research method, hermeneutics requires that the researchers engage themselves into the process of understanding and interpretation, and obligates them to apply the previously gained knowledge and preconceptions into the interpretation process, thus producing a dialogue between themselves and the text to be studied. Gadamer, another essential character in developing philosophical hermeneutics, in fact, stressed the significance of dialogue between the researcher and the text for gaining deeper knowledge and understanding of the text. He proposed that an understanding could only be reached through deep immersion in the texts, which requires repeated readings and continuous exploration of new directions and possible answers. (Von Zweck, 2008, pp. 116-120.) Continuous readings and explorations of new dimensions of the considered theories have been used as one of the main methods of research in this thesis, too, alongside with mutual conversations and applications of previous knowledge into the interpretations made throughout the process. To conclude, this thesis based on deep reading of literature with an interpretative approach to the topics examined in this thesis as well as in our previous work. In the following section, we will describe the entire research process, originating from our personal experiences and continuing to the moment of finalising this thesis and even towards future research.

## **2.2. Describing the journey of the research**

The topic of this thesis derives from our personal experiences from a few years ago, when we travelled to a small and remote village in Northern Thailand to do voluntary work and a teaching practice in a shelter for abused girls. The girls were born as members of some of the hill tribes residing on Thai land, and were therefore in a structurally discriminated position in the Thai society, which had forced them to become, or put them at risk of becoming, victims of human trafficking. As we have dedicated a separate section for a more detailed description of the situation of the hill tribes, it is not meaningful to become immersed in the topic at this point. What is important to remark here, however, is that the experience of working with the girls provoked a great deal of thoughts and emotions in us.

After returning home, we were passionate about and dedicated to researching the situation of the hill tribes as well as discrimination as a broader concept. Consequently, in our Bachelor's thesis we studied the concept of discrimination through the case of the hill tribes and found empowerment to provide a solution to the situation of the hill tribes as well as other peoples in discriminated positions. In the thesis, we explored various dimensions of empowerment and argued that empowerment is the ultimate goal that the discriminated should strive for, and proposed ways to help the hill tribe girls to empower themselves. While doing so, we however, noticed that empowerment does have its limits, and that the term was sort of a fashion icon used in a wide spectrum of situations ranging from empowering the discriminated to increasing revenues in the business world.

After finishing the Bachelor's thesis, we kept contemplating on the concept of empowerment, and whether empowerment after all was enough for the hill tribes, as well as other peoples in similar situation, to be freed from discrimination; we wondered if empowerment was the ultimate goal to be reached or whether there was something beyond it, perhaps something more radical or efficient. We took a break from actively conducting research, and went on our ways to different sides of the world to study abroad in order to gain new perspectives and expand our ways of thinking. While studying abroad, we continued to exchange ideas concerning further research, and eventually after returning back to Finland, we began to construct a research plan for this Master's thesis: the initial aim was to explore and identify other options than empowerment that would better answer the needs of people in discriminated positions.

Thus we continued to study related literature and mature our thoughts about the subject. Our thinking was influenced by the works of Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas, among other scholars, and we began to direct the course of our research emphasis away from empowerment of the discriminated toward emancipation of the oppressed. We discovered that oppression would better describe the situation that we had previously called discrimination since it appears to include a broader range of factors, such as the issues of power relations and societal order. However, as said before, in this thesis we perceive terms such as 'oppression', 'marginalisation' and 'discrimination' more or less as synonyms, as we decided not to focus so much on defining the oppressive situation as we

did in our Bachelor's thesis, but to concentrate on how such a situation can be changed. Additionally, we understood that compared to empowerment, emancipation presents a more concrete and active concept that can provide a solution for the oppressed by redressing the power unbalances and establishing a new societal order that is based on social justice. In other words, we descended a number of rounds in the hermeneutic circle by reading more and, based on what we read, re-interpreting what we had previously studied.

In the beginning of the thesis writing process, a decision was made to utilise the hermeneutic research approach since the nature of our research process quite accurately followed the design of hermeneutic circle with its tendency to read, re-read, and interpret what was previously learned and perceived as legitimate. Additionally, an idea was voiced to introduce two new concepts to the thesis, namely praxis and participatory action research, in order to demonstrate that empowerment and especially emancipation should not be left at the level of theorising, but that they are in fact achievable goals. Therefore, while continuing to deepen our understanding of the relationship between empowerment, emancipation, power, and oppression, we raised discussion on praxis, the union of theory and action, as a means for the oppressed to gain emancipation, and introduced participatory action research to illustrate how emancipation through praxis can be achieved in practice.

Finally, as the process of thesis writing is almost at its end, we realise that there is still significantly much to learn about this topic. The research we have conducted after completing our Bachelor's thesis did not only give us answers to the questions about the (in)sufficiency of empowerment, but also opened dozens of new doors to the world of emancipation and beyond. We are conscious of the fact that we have only scratched the surface and thus begun to understand the richness and vastness of the topic we have been trying to grasp in this thesis. Accordingly, the hermeneutic circle leads the research to understand that their learning process is never complete, but there are always new perspectives, theories, etc. to consider and to reflect on.

### **3. FROM PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE TOWARDS NEW THEORIES**

As we are using hermeneutic methodological approach in our thesis, we find it essential to present the starting point of our research process, i.e. the case of Baan Yuu Suk that was the basis of our research in our Bachelor's thesis (Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011). In this chapter we will first shortly introduce the case and the findings we made at the time. After that we will move onto discussing theories of power, empowerment, and finally emancipation. While doing so, we will use quotes from our Bachelor's thesis to illustrate the learning journey and hermeneutic circle that we have been through. We will thus deepen our knowledge on the previously examined theories and present the theories that have emerged through revision and further studying. While doing so we will be constructing a clear image of what we consider to be the essence of these theories as well as the next steps to be taken if we wish to take these theories onto an empirical level and conduct emancipatory research among a group of oppressed people. What we find important in the light of the hermeneutic approach is the use of not only the quotes that illustrate the changes in our paradigms but also the ones that have not gone through such drastic changes. Therefore some of the quotes will be demonstrating the changed conceptions, whereas others will depict how our thoughts on certain concepts have remained fairly similar and those quotes will therefore be used to exemplify the themes we are discussing.

#### **3.1. The case**

In the spring of 2010, in April and May, we spent nearly six weeks doing a teaching practice in a small, rural village in Northern Thailand. We did our practice at a shelter called Baan Yuu Suk, where we taught English to a group of discriminated girls. The shelter is run by Children's Organization of South East Asia (COSA) which is a non-governmental organization working towards improving the status of these girls and their families in Thai society. The Baan Yuu Suk shelter serves as a home for girls and young women who are victims or at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. The girls living at the shelter come from hill tribes families, who are discriminated in Thailand based

on their ethnicity, and the girls have therefore had to work in various kinds of fields, including prostitution, to provide for their families.

Our thesis was a case study that used the story of Baan Yuu Suk to illustrate the themes of empowerment, and especially empowering education both in the case of the discriminated girls living at the shelter as well as discriminated young girls all over the world. The thesis was a qualitative study based on our personal experiences and diaries as well as research done after our return to Finland. One of our main aims was to produce an introduction to the case of Baan Yuu Suk as well as to the concept of empowerment for the future voluntary workers at Baan Yuu Suk concerning empowering education and how it could be implemented in this specific case.

Approximately 60 per cent of the hill tribe population in Thailand attained citizenship in the 1960s, leaving 40 per cent without any governmental acknowledgment (Thailand, 1994). The history of hill tribes is not a specifically united one. Some hill tribes have settled centuries ago and established permanent residences, whereas other tribes have migrated more recently and to some extent kept their traditional nomadic way of life. This migration process is vitally important due to its close connection with gaining citizenship: “for the members of a village to be eligible for citizenship, the village must be settled permanently and be officially recognized by the [Thai] Department of Local Administration” (Aguettant, 1996). The hill tribe people themselves regard gaining citizenship as their first priority on their way of becoming equal with the Thai citizens. The hill tribe people without citizenship lack many of the rights that Thai citizens have, e.g. rights to land, education and professions. The Thai government is, however, mainly concerned with the major problems that have been traditionally associated with the hill tribes, such as “opium cultivation, drug addiction, national security issues, conservation of natural resources and environmental degradation” (Aguettant, 1996; Bhruksasri, 1989, p. 230). The oppression of hill tribes is in fact rooted in the making of the Thai state, as there has been a need to define the so-called real Thai people: a unified group of people who represent the Thai. Thai people have attempted to define themselves by defining ‘the others’ in the same way as was done during the Western colonialism. There are in fact several aspects that separate the hill tribes of Thailand from the predominant inhabitants,

such as physical appearance and language. (Wittayapak, 2008, pp. 112-114.) Thus the discrimination of the hill tribes begins from the very basic level of looks and language as a Thai resident can immediately recognise if a person is of hill tribe descent or not.

While the hill tribe people still struggle deprived of many rights that are self-evident to the citizens of Thailand, it should be pointed out that the work of a group of governmental as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has had significant effects on the lives of the hill tribes. The hill tribe members themselves feel that there have been improvements in several areas in their lives, including participation in the decision-making processes and education. (Fujioka, 2002, p. 25.) In fact, Children's Organization of South-East Asia (COSA), the establisher of the Baan Yuu Suk shelter is one of these non-governmental organisations working towards improving the situation of hill tribes in Thailand.

Our main findings in the Bachelor's thesis considered empowerment and empowering education. We concluded that while no one can give empowerment to another person, there is a need for the girls to become more empowered and that can best be nourished by providing them with resources and skills, the final aim must be for the girls to become empowered within, to see their own potential regardless of the environment. In conclusion, we saw empowerment as small, concrete victories on the way to something bigger, more abstract, such as life management in general and being able to contribute to the surrounding community. We also made some suggestions for the Baan Yuu Suk shelter in regard to improving the on-going process of empowerment and wanted thus to support the task of the permanent staff as well as the voluntary workers. We proposed for the employees and volunteers in the shelter to start working on a long-term plan for empowerment and empowering education. We also addressed the issues that would provide challenges to the empowerment process such as discussing the negative effects of the pupil's ethnic background when applying for work and were generally worried about the possible disempowering experiences that the girls living at the shelter may be going through. We concluded that the plan for empowering education has to be fitted into the context of the people in the need of empowerment and that therefore familiarising oneself with the people and their background is crucial when developing the plan.

We were quite happy with the findings of our Bachelor's thesis and saw empowerment as the main goal for the girls of Baan Yuu Suk and hill tribes in general. However, at the same time we were left with some questions about empowerment and whether it after all was the optimal goal or if there was a better alternative for it. Thus, with the elaboration on the topic that we have done in this thesis, our views have somewhat developed and changed even. Therefore we will use excerpts (written in italics) from our Bachelor's thesis to exhibit this development in our thoughts and conceptions in the following chapter that will delve deeper into the world of not only empowerment but power and finally emancipation and its practical implications as well.

### 3.2. Power

*The hill tribe people without citizenship lack many of the rights that Thai citizens have, e.g. rights to land, education and professions. The Thai government is, however, mainly concerned with the major problems that have been traditionally associated with the hill tribes, i.e. when discussing "opium cultivation, drug addiction, national security issues, conservation of natural resources and environmental degradation." (Aguettant, 1996.) The discrimination of hill tribes is rooted in the making of the Thai state. [...] It is in fact the officials who still want to palm off the voice of the people from the hills and it is thus difficult to affect the policies. (McKinnon, 2005, pp. 37-38.)*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

In our Bachelor's thesis we did not address the issues concerning power directly, but it can be seen quite clearly that while we may have not realised it, a great deal of the time we de facto touched upon themes of power without analysing how they might actually relate to empowerment. Therefore, in this chapter we will take a closer look at power as a concept of its own and develop an understanding of different ways in which the concept can be defined. We will take a look at how power is perceived from the viewpoint of both an

individual as well as the state and the close relation of the two. While doing so, we intend to construct a basic comprehension of the nature of power, which will in turn form a solid basis for the later study on empowerment, emancipation, and the fundamental differences between the two.

### 3.2.1. Power as a concept

As stated earlier, when discussing empowerment or emancipation, one cannot dismiss the discussion on power, as it is perhaps the most important concept relating to both. Empowerment and emancipation have become increasingly timely topics in the last few years. There still seems, however, to be a lack of consensus concerning power and its nature (Masaki, 2006, p. 723). Inglis (1997, pp. 1-6) reminds us of the importance of understanding power and the ways in which it works if one wishes to make a change in the present society and to move from colonising actions towards a society based on free and honest communication. What poses the greatest obstacle to the conduction of emancipatory education is the lack of analysis on power and the structure and constraints of society that control not only actions but also discussion and even thoughts. People who are under oppression are rarely aware of the constraints that power holds over their actions and decisions and are thus unable to affect their own position in the community, or to go as far in the emancipatory actions as to change the prevailing system.

The word *power* derives from the French word *pouvoir*, which can be further traced to the Latin word *potentia* which in essence means ability or potential. Already in the early Roman meaning of the word, it referred to the ability to affect someone or something. The problem that arises from this description is that it may portray *power* in a simple and easily graspable light while the concept is highly debatable and in fact the centre of a major philosophical debate. (Abel & Sementelli, 2002, p. 256; Ceceña, 2012, p. 124; Jenson, 2008, pp. 236-237; Masaki, 2006, p. 723.) Furthermore, this complex nature of power is closely related to its other definitions that view power in light of perspectives such as violence, authority, coercion, and dominion (Jenson, 2008, pp. 236-237). With this Jenson clearly speaks of the domination-focused side of power that refers to people who try and



want to exercise their power over other people, regardless of whether it is for the greater good or only for the advantage of themselves or for the advantage of only a few.

Ricken (2006, p. 542) suggests that it is this very issue of the term power being disguised as a rather simple and unmistakable concept that generates the problems surrounding it. He claims that whoever attempts to speak about power in an analytical way, is always trying to uncover something that is supposedly hidden or not seen. At the same time, however, the speaker is in a position where they use this power themselves by defining their own truths and premises (Ceceña, 2012, p. 119; Ricken, 2006, p. 542; Rømer, 2011, p. 759). Thus it could be claimed that one can never truly objectively speak about power but rather that there is always something between the lines that cannot be eliminated and that all knowledge and all actions are subjective (Ben-Yosef, 2011, pp. 57-58; Collins, 2012, p. 454; Madison, 2005, p. 208; Ricken, 2006, p. 542; Wendt & Seymour, 2010, pp. 674-675). This issue will be dealt with more detail in the future chapters concerning praxis and PAR. Ricken's (2006, p. 542) observations mean that power as a term is a profoundly "normatively loaded term" which furthermore emphasises the fact that always when one makes a statement about power or attempts to analyse it, one leaves something unsaid and gives something else a greater role and thus uses power themselves.

Power circulates everywhere in people's daily lives from work to school to personal life. In order to gain the desired outcome, people use their abilities of persuading, influencing or even commanding others to perform the wished actions, even against their own will. Simultaneously, people are trying to prevent other people from doing the same thing to them, so that they would not have to commit actions they do not want to commit. In addition to all this, power is also something more invisible, harder to grasp. Power is everywhere in the society in regulations, laws, rules and general discourse as well as practice. (Inglis, 1997, pp. 1-2; Wendt, & Seymour, 2010, pp. 676-677.) This brings us to an interesting dilemma concerning power and truth: if power and power relations control what is considered as the truth, how can one make any 'true' claims on what power is? Furthermore, is it even possible to find or worthwhile to look for a truth that would exist out of the realm of power? (Inglis, 1997, pp. 1-2.) Ball (as cited in Wang 2011, p. 144) also addresses the importance of bearing in mind the political nature of rules and

regulations and how they always reflect the will of certain people more than those of others. This naturally poses a challenge to any researcher discussing power. Therefore we believe it is essential for a researcher as well as other agents such as teachers or other leaders to be aware of the power relations in their work, and how they choose to treat those relations either for their own advantage or alternatively for the greater good. We will continue to discuss the role of the researcher and the power relations within a research in more detail in the chapter that covers PAR as a research approach.

In an interesting—and in this thesis a very relevant—case Inglis (1997, p. 7) presents the classic classroom scenario where the teacher has an immense amount of power in defining how the situation is carried out and if the classes have an emancipatory or oppressive (one that reinforces the existing power structures or does not encourage critique towards them) effect on the students. The oppressors use the so-called banking form of education as an instrument of oppression. Freire (1996, pp. 52-55) states that *banking education*, where the teacher pours their knowledge into the passive students who merely absorb the information without deliberating upon it, is a form of education that discourages critical thinking. Ben-Yosef (2011, pp. 57-58), De Lissovoy (2010, pp. 205-207), and Worthman (2008, p. 448) also contribute to the same discussion as Freire and address similar questions about education and its position in the field of power, although they do not refer to it with the term banking education.

Banking education prevents the students from learning to think for themselves and questioning the information and environment that surrounds them: banking education prevents the awakening and emergence of *conscientização* among the oppressed and thus serves the oppressors' purpose to maintain the status quo. Thus the teacher can either work as part of the system, execute their power over the classroom and thus reinforce the prevailing power structures, or they can conduct truly emancipatory learning where they make their students aware of the power teachers traditionally have in the classroom, where that power comes from, and if that power could or should be challenged. This technique is naturally quite risky for the teacher if they are afraid of losing authority in the classroom. (Freire, 1996, pp. 52-55; Inglis, 1997, p. 7.) However, we believe that this is the only way

of raising students that are aware of their own rights, have the ability to question authority, truths, and assumptions and who are not afraid of making their voices heard.

Hegel (2001, p. 159) and Freire (1996, pp. 74-75) also ponder on this and conclude that education has the potential to be truly liberating, if conducted in the best possible way. It is, however, challenging for education to reach this aim as there are a great deal of opposing powers and both personal as well as authoritative interests that threaten this kind of education. Inglis (1997, p. 3) states that without an analysis of power, the empowering process people are going through might lack the emancipatory aspect and become merely a form of self-control within the system. We believe that the discussion on power is essential, crucial even, when addressing issues such as emancipation and empowerment because when discussing empowerment and emancipation, the very first thing we need to understand is how power works: who has it, how one can attain more of it, and how power is built and how it works within the society in both visible and invisible ways. We need to break the massive concept of power into smaller pieces and to find the ones we can meaningfully use in this thesis. We will come back to these questions later in the part where we discuss emancipation.

### 3.2.2. Individual, identity and the state

Hegel (as cited in Plamenatz, 1972, p. 34) talks about tradition and how it affects the present day in a society. According to him, earlier practices, norms, and values inevitably affect the way in which the present-day society is organised, whether those values or norms are still valid in the contemporary context, and whether they serve the interest of the oppressed or the oppressors. Furthermore, he states that these practices and norms can be implemented in ways which make them related to completely new ideas than the original ones, and that usually this happens without even the implementers realising it. According to Hegel (2001, pp. 170-171), it is only when what is considered right in the community actually goes as far as becoming a law that it attains both its universality, but also “its own truest character”. It is then that “all random intuitions and opinions, revenge, compassion, and self-interest, fall away” (ibid.). Thus Hegel describes the path of an accepted value or

norm into becoming an enforced law in one particular society at a particular time. Furthermore, it is those values and norms that separate humans from animals, which in turn only have their instincts as laws. We see this formation of norms and furthermore rules as one of the crucial discussions concerning power and especially its effects. We believe that by further studying the formation of norms and the understanding of present customs, values, and laws in different settings will further broaden our comprehension of power within diverse societies. However, we hesitate to agree with Hegel in that a law would necessary be free of e.g. opinions or self-interest since, as we have stated before, power circulates everywhere in the society in norms, rules, and regulations that are all constructed by human beings that have their own opinions and agendas.

Additionally, Freire (1996, pp. 25-26) introduces the concepts of humanisation and dehumanisation and argues that dehumanisation is a tool of the oppressors in the inequitable social arrangement. As opposed to humanisation, dehumanisation uses the means of violence and oppression to restrain the oppressed people from becoming fully human. In the next excerpt we will take a look at how several quarters are striving to help the hill tribes to gain the same rights as Thai citizens and to reduce the discrimination of the hill tribes. On a broader scale the quote will demonstrate the role power relations in the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed and how challenging it often is to try to change the power balance from within the society. In our Bachelor's thesis we wrote:

*At the moment several non-governmental organisations in Thailand are working hard to introduce anti-discrimination to the Thai society and try to make the Thai people see hill tribes from another, a more positive, angle. According to Scheinin & Toivanen (2004), anti-discrimination, or non-discrimination, is an approach, which is trying to establish "more equality and sameness between different individuals and groups of people". Anti-discrimination and especially pursuit of equality is important, because discrimination fights against the basic idea of modern democracy and society, which recognises the equity of all citizens, including their individual worth and rights. According to the concept of democratic citizenship a person's status in the society should not be determined by their ethnic origin, but people should*

*be seen as individuals with equal rights under the law. Equality is, as a matter of fact, the base of human rights since all human rights should be equally available for all humanity without discrimination, and receiving equal treatment is a resource that should belong to all. (Kymlicka & Norman, 2010, p. 61; Makkonen, 2004, p. 156; Toivanen, 2004, p. 194.)*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

Even though in our Bachelor's thesis we did not discuss power or the role of the state in relation to power it becomes quite apparent through this quote that we have already at that stage understood the important part the state plays in the situation of the hill tribes. In other words it can be said that we have understood how dominant the state and its policies are. In a thesis that discusses power, oppression, emancipation, etc., it is essential to also discuss the role of the state in these power relations and to explore the different roles a state may play in different stages of history to the date. Hegel (2001, pp. 154-155) criticises the narrow understanding of the state that several researchers pose where a state consists of a mere group of individuals that strive for their own agendas without concern for the wellbeing of others. He argues that one cannot realise their full potential until one starts to communicate and work in cooperation with others. Ricken (2006, p. 548) also discusses the nature of power and defines it as something that one exercises rather than owns since power does not exist in a vacuum but one needs another person to exercise their power over. Therefore we believe that it is crucial to understand how different kinds of societies entail disparate amounts and kinds of power and how that affects how power is seen today in various societies. It is quite clear that in the Thai society the hill tribes lack power to take part in the decision-making which also concerns their own lives and that they are consistently oppressed by the Thai government but also discriminated by a great deal of Thai people based on their ethnic background.

In his book *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) Habermas describes the various stages of society and how they act when facing a crisis. By taking a look at these stages and thus gaining an understanding of how power circulates within them, one begins to understand the very nature of power in different contexts and societies. In Habermas' work one can distinguish

four stages of society: *primitive*, *traditional*, *capitalist*, and *post-capitalist*. What makes the primitive society unique among these is that it is the only one of the four that is not a class society. As the primitive societies are based on family or tribal ties and kinship, they cannot raise their productivity through the exploitation of labour force. Furthermore, these kinds of societies tend not to aim at excessive production, i.e. producing goods that are not necessary for satisfying the society's basic needs. Thus it could be said that these societies lack the seeds of crisis as they all have the one mutual goal of surviving by working as one close-knit group. Consequently, it can be argued that in such societies power does not play as big a part because each member of the group has a significant role in ensuring the survival of the entire group. The acquisition of power is, therefore, not seen as something quite as desirable and profitable since it does not really give a person anything more. The group will still have to fight for survival together, as a tight, well-operating group where disagreements or crises will endanger the existence of all. (Habermas, 1973, pp. 17-19.)

This, however, will radically change when a society goes through significant changes and an authority or several authorities arise. The distribution as well as the very importance of power changes drastically. Private ownership over all means of production generates new power relationships in a traditional society. These changes naturally threaten *social integration*, which in turn poses a threat of crisis within such a society. (Habermas, 1973, pp. 17-19.) Furthermore, Habermas (ibid.) notes that the authority which the society is based on will be able to keep any kind of opposition at a bay for a certain while, and to a certain extent. This happens through the establishment of the legitimation of an ideology or a worldview, i.e. setting norms that reinforce the power of the authority. Habermas (1973) himself sees his own work as a theoretical framework, a kind of preparatory theory that will have to be taken to another, empirical level. He states that his claims and theories alone will not be enough to resolve the issues he discusses but rather that they are a starting point for further empirical research that will bring us closer to solving these dilemmas. We agree with Habermas and hold this statement as one of the affirmations that will validate our suggestions for future actions that would potentially nourish emancipation within oppressed communities. Furthermore, to take the discussion into the specific context of hill tribes, we believe that Habermas' theories may help one to understand the situation of the hill tribes and to provide some tools for conducting meaningful emancipatory research in cooperation with hill tribe people. As stated in the quote, there are several NGOs working

to improve the status of the hill tribes already, but we also believe that researchers may provide a meaningful addition to this group of people, and provide important insights into the work of NGOs as well.

Moltchanova (2013, p. 96), brings the discussion on power, authority and oppression on a very practical level as she describes a situation where an oppressed person might join a regime and participate in events they do not agree with. They do this not because they agree with the regime and have had an opportunity to have a say in the common rules but rather because of their personal safety or because of the advantages that staying on the same side with the authority provides. In this situation it is painfully clear how in this case one person or alternatively small elite has the absolute power over a (great) number of people against the will of these people under the new rule (Rømer, 2011, p. 759). The oppressed are afraid to say or do as they wish and will therefore join into doing things others want them to do. Indeed, according to some scholars, freedom is a crucial factor in power relations and in the exercising of power. They insist that in order for the discussion to be truly dynamic, all the participants should be equally free and in equal positions. (Säfström, 2011, p. 206; Wang, 2011, p. 1.) We find this an interesting, yet a problematic claim in the light of our research. As we have learned that power is not something very concrete that can be handed down to a person but rather something more invisible that is ever present and circulates around the society and the people in it, we question the very possibility of equal freedom of all participants, which indeed sounds like a desirable goal. However, it also appears to be an idealistic and impractical aspiration that can never realistically be reached as two people can never really be completely equal. There is always some kind of power relationship between two people that dictates the way they are communicating. Having said this, we also feel the need to apprehend the importance of striving towards maximum equality and the abolishment of power relations between people. We believe that while the suppression of the effects of power relations seems like an unattainable goal, it does not change the fact that the strive for the reduction of the harmful effects must still be the ultimate endeavour towards which actions should be aimed at.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the individual in the discussion on power. Inglis (1997, pp. 6-10) and Allen (2008, pp. 158-159) address two ways of understanding power. The first one is to understand power as a capital of different kinds: economic, political, social, or cultural. This presents power as something a person owns for different kinds of reasons. Furthermore, in such a scenario power is something that can be gained at the cost of someone else losing their power on one or more sectors. This is quite a traditional look at power that is easy to grasp and understand, yet difficult to agree with in terms of ideal social arrangements. The second approach he suggests is a far more radical one, aiming at social change by challenging pre-existing structures of power. What is often forgotten when discussing power is that it does not only provide an individual with the freedom to make their own choices but rather that power also gives that person authority to influence the wishes, thoughts and aims of others and to what extent people are able to reach those aims. (Abel & Sementelli, 2002, p. 256, 259; Young, 2010, pp. 4-5.) Thus these different aspects of power necessarily set people in unequal positions where some people have virtually no power and others have a disproportionate amount of it. The change in the way people perceive the world around them has consequently had an effect on the way power operates as well. While power has previously been understood as a tool for control and restriction, it has recently changed along with the society towards a focus on effectiveness and productivity. Inglis (1997, pp. 6-10) goes as far as stating that in this struggle empowerment has become a slave to power because it works within the existing system and focuses on the individual gaining more power, while emancipation is understood to resist that unequal system and aim towards an overarching social change. Let us consider the case of the hill tribes and their ambitions to gain more power while still working within the system.

*Furthermore, the tradition of human trafficking and child labour, especially prostitution, has its roots deep in the culture of the hill tribes. In lack of other means of providing a living for themselves, families send their children to work. In fact, "poor legislation, police corruption, and ingrained cultural norms are widely blamed for the lack of effective measures against prostitution." (Thailand, 1994.) This was the case with the Baan Yuu Suk girls as well. When doing our practice at Baan Yuu Suk we learnt that the hill tribe communities and the families of the girls were (at least partly) responsible for*



*the human trafficking and child labour, because usually the traffickers themselves do not visit the villages, but have contact persons in hill tribe villages, i.e. actual hill tribe people, who contact the families of potential victims and promise the parents money if they send their girls to work. Kiyosue (2004, pp. 168-169) confirms what we have learned in Thailand, and continues that also the corruption in Thailand plays a big role in human trafficking as the police officers are easily bribed to ignore what is going on.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

Thus it can be clearly seen that there are some fundamental problems within the Thai governmental system that make possible and even encourage hill tribe oppression. Returning to Hegel's theory, according to Plamenatz (1972, p. 42), Hegel's perhaps biggest flaw as a social theorist is his uncritical faith in the inherent rationality of a state; he believes it forms a united front that aims at shared goals. Naturally, while making such statements, Hegel refers to an ideal state he has in mind, but he still argues that "even an imperfect state is likely to be wiser than any individual or group subject to it with whom it comes into conflict" (ibid.). We agree with Plamenatz in his critique to the state and recognise the threats to freedom and liberation that lie in the very essence of this statement: Hegel seems to believe that any state has the best interest of its residents in mind and even in its imperfect condition, a state is still more 'right' than its residents. While emancipation requires a certain degree of faith in people and their innate goodness, one should not be naïve and expect *all* states to have the best interests of *all* its residents in its mind, as history has clearly shown. We believe that as long as the traditional ideas of power continue to prevail within the states, there will always be a group of oppressors and a group of oppressed. It is only the degree of oppression and the effects of it that may vary. Therefore we propose that an alternative mind-set, namely such that is more aware of and critical towards power, should be adopted into the discussion. Furthermore, in the following chapters we will propose ways of taking actions towards a more equitable society where oppressive structures and policies should be challenged and where there would be new kind of thinking concerning power altogether.

### 3.3. Empowerment

*According to our findings, empowerment is something that deals with several aspects of life: empowerment within, power over resources, government policies, and so on and so forth. While we need to empower the girls by providing them with resources and skills, the final aim must be for the girls to become empowered within, to see their own potential regardless of the environment.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

In our Bachelor's thesis the most important concept for our study was empowerment, its different aspects as well as its practical implications. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the term as we bring in more literature while grounding our study on the research made for our Bachelor's thesis. We will change our focus slightly as in this thesis we are more interested in the relations of empowerment and power than previously, whereas in our Bachelor's thesis we were discussing the specific case of the hill tribes, their situation, and how empowerment could improve that situation. Furthermore, we will introduce into the discussion the more critical views on empowerment as well; the ones we acknowledged in our Bachelor's thesis but did not recognise critical importance of, and therefore chose not to focus on with greater detail. In doing so, we will attempt to form a holistic idea of what the concept of empowerment entails, how we have chosen to see it in this thesis, and how that comes together with emancipation as we move towards action from mere reflection.

When discussing empowerment, one must first understand the different ways in which the term itself can be understood as well as the standpoint we take in the issue, i.e. how we in this thesis have chosen to use the term empowerment. As one begins to research the term *empowerment*, it quite soon becomes apparent that it is approached by each individual researcher from a unique point of view and the term in itself is still somewhat ambiguous (Järvinen, 2007, p. 60; Siitonen, 1999, pp. 83-84). Thus it is quite frankly impossible for us to form an exact definition for empowerment or make a definite argument for a correct way of using the term. Rather, we must through thorough study find the definitions that are

meaningful for this thesis and its purposes. In his research Siitonen (1999, p. 93) suggests that there are some contradictions in the discussion on empowerment that remain yet to be solved and that the debate in some ways seems to be revolving around the same grounding questions: whether empowerment is something one can give to another person or if empowerment must stem from a person themselves. Furthermore, there are several complex dilemmas behind both these statements that must be addressed for one to truly understand how empowerment can be interpreted in such different ways as well as how we have chosen to interpret it in this study.

According to Parpat et al. (2002, p. 3) and Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008, p. 260), the roots of empowerment are in Paulo Freire's theories and pedagogy. During Freire's time, empowerment was mostly considered to be closely related to social change and grassroots-level influencing. A new development in the field of empowerment seems to have occurred ever since both local and global operators such as companies and other communities have adopted ideas of empowerment and broadened the term quite a bit. Thus the term has been forced to settle into such various meanings that it has in some ways become perhaps even too ambiguous. (Parpat et al., 2002, p. 3.) Furthermore, Inglis (1997, p. 11) also claims that while empowerment may origin from the radical social reformists of the 1960's, it has very much become an individualistic approach to a greater, more universal problem that is much more complex and entails aspects of e.g. power and economics. This without a doubt raises an important question of whether empowerment as a term can be meaningfully used in research, whether one should invent a more appropriate term for the purpose, or if empowerment can be understood by individual scholars to serve the various needs in their researches.

### 3.3.1. Individual and empowerment

Siitonen (1999, p. 87) states that in order to be empowered, a person must first have a clear identity. In the light of this statement, one must ponder on the question of whether becoming empowered equals to discovering one's identity. Thus also one's self-image is quite naturally at the heart of the discussion concerning empowerment. Siitonen (1999, pp.

130-131) states that the self-image one possesses holds a connection with the kind of expectations one has for the future and how that person estimates their own potential and resources in relation to those expectations. What makes self-image possibly even more important is the fact that a person also evaluates their close environment through that self-image. In essence this means that a person's image of themselves is necessarily defined by the relations that the person has with other people, that is, how one sees oneself and their role in the different communities one is a part of.

Empowerment and the feeling of being empowered brings along the sense of responsibility and the growing willingness and readiness to take into consideration the needs of others as well (Siitonen, 1999, p. 61). Thus it could be argued that while empowerment may stem from a person themselves, it will most probably have a great deal of positive effect and even a snowball effect, so to speak, within that person's community. Furthermore, one person's empowerment can lead into a collective sense of ability, which again can lead into emancipatory actions within and outside the community. We believe that with these statements Siitonen (ibid.) refers to the emancipatory process that often begins with empowerment.

*Desai (2002, p. 223) proposes a question of if women actually want to become empowered in the first place. Wieringa, as cited in Desai, states that the process of re-evaluating one's conception about one's own life can often be a highly painful process and it is easy to fall back into the safe—although also painful—past. It must also be discussed whether it is right to propose changes that will so profoundly change the beliefs and structures of a group. These kinds of questions leave non-governmental organisations with a moral dilemma of whether it is more wrong to interfere or to ignore the inequality. (Desai, 2002, pp. 223-231.)*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

In our Bachelor's thesis we began to discuss the subject of the fear of freedom that the oppressed often experience. As can be seen in the quote, we had to reflect on two questions: whether realising the oppression that the hill tribes and Baan Yuu Suk girls specifically would be too painful for them to fully understand, and whether they were willing to strive for freedom and to take responsibility for their own lives. Stromquist (2002, pp. 27-28) ponders on the subject of seeing oneself as a victim: whether it hinders empowerment or is the first step towards it. Freire (1996, pp. 28-30) writes that in addition to the preventative actions taken by the oppressors, striving for liberation is hindered by the duality that exists in the oppressed; while the oppressed desire freedom and being fully humanised, they also fear it. The fear of freedom originates in the prescribed behaviour of the oppressed, as they have been following the guidelines given by the oppressors throughout the era of oppression and that way internalised the image of the oppressor. Liberation would demand replacing the mimicked image of the oppressor as the ruling class with autonomy and responsibility in order to ensure that liberation would not turn into another wave of oppression. (Freire, 1996, pp. 28-30; Weiler, 1991, pp. 452-453.)

We agree that it may be paralysing to fully understand one's own oppressive situation and the complexity of it. On the other hand, acknowledging one's situation may also be the starting point to a healing process: to recognise the fact that the oppressed need and above all deserve to have their voices heard and to be respected. We believe that hiding one's head in the bushes does not lead into anything. Ramos (2007, p. 193), who has been working on an empowerment project called FotoDialogo Method, agrees that there has to be awareness of the situation of the person to be empowered in order to demand and strive for improvement. We believe that while a considerable risk of victimisation lies in recognising the oppression affecting one's life, it is still a crucial part of the journey towards empowerment and emancipation from oppression and cannot thus be ignored.

The aforementioned ability to make a change in one's life is one of the key characteristics of a truly empowered person. One is thus not only skilled cognitively and socially but also able to use these skills in order to create change in one's life. (Järvinen, 2007, pp. 72-73; Peterson et al., 2011, p. 593.) Järvinen (ibid.) also suggests that characteristics such as curiosity, inquiry and wondering are some of the most defining qualities in recognising 'a

truly empowered person'. Accordingly, we argue it is important not to dwell on self-pity but to constantly make the effort, learn new things and be the one making the change. We will, however, come back to the definition of being able to make a change in one's life in the next chapter where we discuss emancipation and its relation to empowerment, and explain how our view on the ability to make a change in one's life differs from that of Järvinen; or rather we look at empowerment from a different kind, less individualistic and more society-critical perspective for the purposes of emancipation. In the following excerpt we will take a look at how individual efforts are often affected by outside factors that lie deep in the making of a society such as globalisation, attitudes, and norms. Thus it will become clear how it is sometimes rather challenging or even impossible for an individual to become empowered in a very disempowering environment.

*In many of these countries the attendance of girls at school is so low that mere participation is seen as fulfilling the description of empowerment. (Stromquist, 2002, p. 24.) [...] Furthermore, it is often assumed that all the knowledge that the girls are provided at school automatically raises their sense of self-worth and guides them towards becoming more aware of their own possibilities. This is naturally not the case: girls especially often receive all but auspicious and empowering feedback at school and they are encouraged to follow the stereotypical path of a woman in that particular society, often being seen as a synonym for inferiority to men. (Stromquist, 2002, p. 24.) Throughout time, women have been raised to see men as superior and themselves as inferior. There must be a change regarding this belief: it is the only way to empower women. Without a sense of self-worth, there is no empowerment.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

In an increasingly globalised world one cannot disregard the discussion on the effects of globalisation on empowerment. When thinking about whether globalisation is a challenge or a possibility, quite a few people see globalisation as an opportunity for empowering people, especially women. It provides the oppressed with a possibility of affecting their own lives and future through market economy. However, these opportunities still remain

affected by race and class. This holds true in the case of the Baan Yuu Suk and in the situation of hill tribes as well. While they are granted access to schooling, they often receive disempowering feedback, and after their studies they still remain in an unequal position as jobseekers compared to their fellow Thai graduates. Furthermore, while women may have an access to the job market, their access is often restricted to poorly paid jobs such as jobs in the service sector. (Parpat et al, 2002, pp. 13-14.) Thus it can be said that while one aspect of empowerment may have been positively affected by globalisation, others are still running behind, and a great deal of work still needs to be done on closing this gap between races and classes. However, the effects of race, gender, or a specific class within a society are something we will not focus too much on in this thesis. Instead, we will be focusing more on general themes of oppression and if and how it can be overcome through empowerment and/or emancipation. Nevertheless, the themes of systemic oppression that become visible in the quote above are an excellent example of the kind of challenges empowerment still faces in the era of internationalism and thus provide an illustration of the dilemmas encompassed in this chapter.

Some scholars think that most people raising the issue of empowerment are too focused on the local level instead of viewing a global picture. Global and national politics are crucial when thinking about the empowering processes. Thus the state politics have an important role in providing either an empowering or disempowering living environment. On a global scale, the role of the state has changed in the process of empowerment as NGOs have to a great extent taken over the role of the institution providing empowerment. However, it is also true that the significance of empowerment is seen as increasingly important by the national governments as well. (Parpat et al, 2002, pp. 13-15.) It seems that the governments are beginning to realise how the situation of the least privileged affect the entire nation and its politics. However, one must also bear in mind the earlier discussion on power in this thesis and thus ask whether in the end the real role of the state in the present-day market-economy driven society is that of serving its residents or that of serving economic growth. We also believe that it is valid to pose questions of the reasons behind their interest in empowerment or emancipation: whether it is for noble reasons, having the best interest of their residents in mind, or if it is because empowered people are more profitable for the system for as long as they do not begin to question the system itself. According to Parpat et al (2002, p. 5), social activists often see empowerment as an

endeavour to inspire the poor communities to challenge the present status quo and improve their lives on a grassroots level, whereas in business research it is seen as something that helps “improving productivity within established structures”. On the other hand, it is also suggested that while the term empowerment on its own remains ambiguous, it is the context within which it is defined. We in this thesis, however, have decided to make a clear distinction between empowerment and emancipation and thus also clarify the difference of working within the oppressive system, conformed in its legitimated norms and values, and on the other hand realising the oppressiveness of that system and striving to make a change.

### 3.3.2. Towards emancipation

As stated before, there are as many approaches to empowerment as there are researchers dealing with the term. Several scholars, while talking about empowerment, focus on the *power over* something. For a number of scholars, empowerment as a word is “an action verb” and suggests power over something, i.e. the ability to make a change. For some scholars this would consequently mean that empowerment needs such radical changes in the power structures that it requires a revolution, while others see it as a pathway to a rational discussion. Other scholars, on the contrary, focus more on the *power within*, the thought of finding one’s self-worth regardless of policies, attitudes and the rest of the people. However, there seems to be an agreement on the fact that while seeing the *power within* is an important part of empowerment, it is not enough by itself. That path leads nowhere unless people are truly in control of the resources. (Nikkhah et al., 2012, pp. 40-41; Parpat et al., 2002, pp. 5-16.) Thus, there needs to be more than only the will to change attitudes. There must be a conscious, concrete effort to change the policies and laws necessary for creating an empowering environment. This indeed is an interesting viewpoint to empowerment and something we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter that examines emancipation and how we have chosen to interpret the two terms.

Through our study on empowerment and its different aspects, we have come to conclude that for the purposes of this thesis we will define empowerment as a necessary step



towards more concrete actions. According to Freire (1996, pp. 29-36), in the beginning of the liberating process, the oppressed must identify the limiting situation and acquire critical awareness of the situation, because as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the limiting situation, they will retain their status as oppressed. This statement concludes well the role of empowerment as the beginning of an emancipatory process as well as the fact that empowerment is not sufficient in itself. Empowerment remains on the level of working *within* the system instead of challenging the validity of the existing power structures, or indeed trying to change them altogether. Thus we state that while we see the importance of empowerment on an individual level, we believe that the final goal for the oppressed should always be communal actions towards a more equitable society where one's rights would be fully acknowledged. Furthermore, we believe that these goals cannot be satisfactorily reached in a society where there are oppressive policies and see therefore a need for a more active approach to empowerment. This is something we will take a look at in the next chapter that will go more in depth into the concept of *emancipation*, which will help us understand the previous discussion on power and empowerment more thoroughly and furthermore to consider ways in which this more active take on power and empowerment could be reached.

### 3.4. Emancipation

*...recent development on the field would seem to be that while empowerment has generally been viewed as a positive feature, some researchers have become rather sceptical about the word and the way the term meets practice (Järvinen, 2007, p. 60). We in this thesis see empowerment as a positive thing, a goal towards which all our research and suggestions are aiming at.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

The excerpt above illustrates our earlier view on empowerment and how we viewed it as an entirely positive thing, the final goal of our work with the Baan Yuu Suk girls. While studying the subject matter further, however, our perception of empowerment has gone through some quite drastic changes. As stated at the end of previous chapter concerning

empowerment, we have come to understand empowerment in a way that leaves empowerment by itself to be too passive an approach. While we still see the positive in empowerment, we have also come to critique it and emphasise the need for taking actions in order to reach equality and a new, more just social order where power relations are reconstructed in a different way to what we have come to hold as a norm.

When delving into the world of emancipation, one will quickly come to understand that just as it is with empowerment, there are as many conceptions of emancipation as there are researchers. In this chapter, we will take a look at the ideas that we found to be most relevant for this thesis and based on them we will construct our own thoughts concerning emancipation and analyse how they differ from the theories of empowerment we have explored in the previous chapter. Furthermore, we will also ponder on the role of the individual as well as the surrounding society in the emancipatory process and reflect on whether an actual revolution is required to truly attain emancipation. In doing so, we will attempt to make the difference between empowerment and emancipation, as seen in this thesis, as clear as possible. However, it should be noted that we are constructing our own ideas about empowerment, emancipation, and the differences between the two based on both literature as well as our own previous experiences. Along the lines of hermeneutics, we are constantly forming an interpretation of the concepts, and that interpretation is shaped by our forestructures and pre-understandings. Thus one should bear in mind that another researcher can possibly have an entirely different view on these concepts and would therefore not agree with our comparisons.

#### 3.4.1. Emancipation as a concept

In critical theory, emancipation has always been seen as a realistic goal rather than a utopia, and in fact the endeavours towards emancipation have always been at the heart of critical theory. The actual concept of emancipation, however, is often left rather ambiguous and highly debatable (Säfström, 2011, pp. 203-204). According to Ray (1993) the term means literal freedom from hunger as well as physical and social security. However, such conditions are unlikely to be found in a society that is not a true democracy. In most cases,

emancipation is thus seen as juridical equality, the seeming liberty to do as one pleases. For a great deal of people emancipation means the fulfilment of a human being's basic needs as well as social and physical security. Furthermore, to accomplish these goals, the society must be the kind where these aspirations are supported by the government and generally the people in positions of power as well as the general laws and regulations that control the society.

The history of emancipation as a political movement began with the movements of "working class, women, oppressed minorities, and the colonised people" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, pp. 197-198). This provided an opportunity for ideas such as decolonisation, social reform, and democratisation to flourish. Emancipation as a concept has generally been seen as the outsider's pursuits to become part of the inner circle or the oppressed to gain change to the unprivileged situation. Furthermore, Nederveen Pieterse (2000, pp. 197-198) states that the basic idea behind the concept has not changed a great deal with time. However, he suggests that it is the means of emancipation that have taken a leap within the last decades together with the rapidly changing political scene. As stated earlier, one of the major strands of emancipation was the female emancipation movement that targeted at ending "the tyranny of man" (Ray, 1993, p. 7), which they saw as an impediment to the development of modern democratic society. They also argued that "oppression of women could not ultimately withstand the force of rational critique" (ibid.). This brings us to one of the crucial themes of emancipation: the oppression of the people must at some point be defeated by logical critique, and the understanding that there is something in the society that does not serve the well-being of its own residents and that it can thus be said that there is something wrong with the society that must be repaired. Ray (1993) proposes a rather realistic view on emancipation when describing how one should not suppose that common interests would necessarily lead into common actions since there are a great number of variables such as other counter-movements and the strength of conflict management within the movement, to name a few, included in the equation. Thus we can conclude that while emancipation is a goal to be reached for, one should not become naïve in doing so. Rather, one should have a clear idea of what both the possibilities but also challenges and limits of emancipation are in each society during a certain time and to what extent those limits can be overcome.

One important aspect when discussing power, empowerment, or indeed emancipation, is the role of linguistics and dialogue. Freire (1996, pp. 29-36) stresses the need to name the oppressive reality and states that true liberation begins when the oppressed identify the limiting situation and acquire critical awareness of the situation, because as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the limiting situation, they will retain their status as oppressed. It is essential to bring new concepts and ideas into public discussion by first setting names for them. It is only through naming things and thus acknowledging them in the public debate that one can strive for changes. (Ray, 1993, p. 29.) We agree with this statement and add that we believe it is essential to speak out the issues that are hindering liberation and the freedom of mind, but also to acknowledge that in cases where emancipation is needed, there rarely is a possibility for free discussion and naming of things but it is often limited by the state or other governing authority. Moreover, according to a Habermasian worldview, there is no knowledge outside the personal relations; that all knowledge is tied to people and to their relationships with each other (Grundy, 1987, p. 8).

This takes us back to the discussion that was dealt with more in chapter 3.2. that examined power, where we concluded that all ‘truths’ and values are socially constructed and that therefore it is impossible to define an absolute truth or rightful, ‘final’ claims for concepts such as values (Ricken, 2006, p. 542). Furthermore, Grundy (1987, p. 17) also contests the value of consensus and claims that while consensus should not be entirely condemned, it must be viewed critically and one must be able to tell how that consensus was achieved. Furthermore, she demands the reader to question whether the achieved consensus serves the needs and desires of one group above others, and notes that it is important to recognise the interests and agendas of the people involved in the meaning-making and agreement processes. This brings us to the importance of paying close attention to the power relations present in the emancipation process. As established in an earlier chapter discussing power, it is rather unthinkable to expect to attain a situation where all participants would have equal amount of power and possibility to be heard as well as make decisions. There is necessarily always some kind of a power relation between two or more people when they communicate. This is not to say that all attempts at emancipation are in vain. Rather it means that one should pay close attention to one’s actions and acknowledge one’s own role

in the situation as well as understand what both the hidden agendas as well as the consequences of seemingly neutral actions can potentially be.

One of the most central concepts concerning emancipation and one linking it strongly to Freire's concept of liberation is *freedom*. According to Räsänen (2006, p. 44) there are two stages of freedom: first one must gain independence and then self-determination. He states that while independence is negative freedom, i.e. the lack of necessity and external obstacles, self-determination is on the other hand positive freedom, i.e. one's personal potential to do something; in other words it refers more to a person's real possibilities of making genuine choices based on their personal opinions. Traditionally liberalism has emphasized negative freedom, leaving positive freedom rather aside. What we find especially relevant for our research on empowerment, is the question of freedom as being in control of your own life as opposed to being oppressed. In an ideal society government officials actually work in order to protect the individuals from each other. This kind of freedom is usually referred to as *dominion*, which means that each person would have their own certain area in life that is controlled by themselves, without any disturbance from others, yet restricted by laws and public acceptance. (Räsänen, 2006, pp. 44-45; Säfström, 2011, p. 201.) In the following quote, we will illustrate how negative and positive freedom play a part in the lives of the hill tribes and how oppressive policies have the power to diminish the effects of potentially liberating actions like education.

*While the meaning and necessity of education for children, youth and adults has been recognised widely among the hill tribe communities as well as the state, the reality remains unchanged: the hill tribes in general suffer of greater poverty than the rest of the country and their access to higher education and employment afterwards is still quite limited. (Fujioka, 2002, pp. 3-4.) This is a notable challenge for our pupils as well. They are currently attending the local state school and receiving additional lessons from the voluntary workers at the shelter. However, after graduation from the primary school level, they will not receive any kind of certificate of studies because they are not citizens of Thailand. Thus it is basically impossible for them to attend any secondary or higher education or have a decent job. This may lead to the situation where*

*after finishing primary school, the girls will end up in the same occupations they would have done without the schooling, because they cannot obtain a job that would correspond with their education; besides they would earn more money by going back to prostitution, for instance. Thus, there is a danger that the benefits that have been gained through living at the shelter and going to school will be abruptly lost, unless a way to make a change is found.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

Thus it is quite obvious to the reader that in the case of hill tribes, the oppressed often even lack negative freedom since they do not have the same opportunities as Thai citizens. Therefore, even if they would have equal access to lower education and would acquire the same knowledge as their Thai citizen peers, the oppressive legislation will ensure that hill tribe people will not have equal opportunities after graduation from comprehensive school for as long as they lack the official citizenship. This goes to depict the oppressive means that a state or a community would use to keep oppressing a certain group of people for various reasons. Therefore, even if a state may offer a token of freedom to the oppressed, the effects of that are diminished by another oppressive policy.

### 3.4.2. Is revolution required?

Plamenatz (1972, p. 30) concludes Hegel's ideas on freedom by stating that freedom, like power, does not exist in a vacuum but that "it is only as a social and moral being that man is free, that freedom has meaning and value for him, that he achieves it or makes progress towards it". According to a Habermasian view, the emancipatory interest is one of the "fundamental human interests" (Plamenatz, 1972, p. 30). As Grundy (1987, p. 18) analyses, Habermas does not view emancipatory interest as something deriving from value judgments but rather as something fundamental that is realised as soon as two human beings start communicating with each other, i.e. through speech. This very feature in the communication between two people is what according to Habermas separates humans from other forms of life. Furthermore, this idea of emancipatory interest cannot be described as being ontological as such, as it does not exist in a vacuum, without contact to other people. Rather, it requires a situation where people communicate with each other and while doing

so, understand the difference between a true and false statement as well as the conditions behind the situation in which the communication takes place. At the same time, they must remember that there is not only one truth but that there are as many truths as there are people communicating. Plamenatz (1972, p. 30) also reminds us that the limits of individual freedom are guarded by the conditions set by the society and culture in which that individual lives. Furthermore, he states that it is the purpose of one's actions, instead of mere satisfaction of appetites, that defines the pursuit for freedom within an individual. Thus it can be said that one's aspirations for freedom must be personally recognised in order for those aspirations to be purposeful. This brings us towards the concept of praxis, which will be dealt with later on in this thesis.

Moreover, Hegel (as cited in Ilting, 1972, pp. 97-104) argues that it is not enough for the state to guarantee the protection and security of its residents but that a state should go further and nourish the personal and moral growth of a person to their fullest. By this he means that one should have the freedom of mind to do the kind of moral decisions and allow the kind of moral growth that they themselves desire. However, he also reminds us that albeit the state must nourish individual needs and wishes, it should not remain at the level of private interests solely. Suter (1972, pp. 69-70) concludes Hegel's ideas on the duty of the state by proclaiming that according to Hegel the state should grant its residents rights along with restrictions, thus taking a different standpoint to those who believe that political stability could only be achieved through restrictions on the freedom of the citizen. Hegel had more faith in the people and believed that as long as reasonable desires of the people would be fulfilled, the well-being of the entire society would be enhanced. Because of these statements Hegel is often seen as one of the earliest "partisans of the middle class as a political force" (Suter, 1972, p. 70).

*The hill tribe people themselves regard gaining citizenship as their first priority on their way of becoming equal with the Thai citizens. The hill tribe people without citizenship lack many of the rights that Thai citizens have, e.g. rights to land, education and professions.*

(Petrelius & Pihlajamaa, 2011)

This quote clearly presents the oppressive situation in which the hill tribes in Thailand live. Without citizenship they will remain to be classified as second-class residents without the same rights as Thai citizens. Therefore it is valid to pose a question of whether it is possible to attain the set goals with rational discussion and cooperation or whether an actual revolution is required. In the following section we will address the general questions concerning the need for a revolution in situations similar to that of the hill tribes.

Räsänen (2006, pp. 44-45) takes part in the discussion on the possible need for a revolution by stating that without the practical tools to implement freedom there is no real meaning to freedom in the first place. This is where we come to really understand the meaning of positive freedom, as Räsänen elaborates and states an example of negative freedom: a family with the right to school their children but no money to do so. There is the formal freedom of having the right to schooling, but the lack of realising that right. This issue was also discussed when addressing empowerment and the question of whether mere participation in e.g. schooling is enough in the empowering process. As it becomes visible, the same question is quite valid in the debate on emancipation as well. Räsänen (2006, pp. 44-45) also refers to Immanuel Kant who claims that freedom is not merely the lack of restrictions but rather actions taken for and towards a good life. This is where one must remember to give thought to the question of whether an actual revolution is required to attain the ideal society, and if even revolution is enough in the case that it lacks the truly emancipatory idea. An important point in the discussion on empowerment and emancipation is the need to move on from mere opposition and towards constructing action, a meaningful direction that aims at building a better society instead of destroying the old one without a concise plan of the future society. (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, p. 189.) This remains a relevant discussion concerning the hill tribes as well, since they are clearly in need of considerable structural changes within the Thai society but they are not the ones that would have the power to make those changes without a revolution of a certain degree. Nederveen Pieterse (2000, p. 194) discusses the controversy of politics of resistance by illustrating how people generally seem to accept resistance without direction as something quite customary and inevitable instead of demanding clear goals and aims from governments as well as NGOs and other agents in this sector. Suter (1972, p. 55) states that



according to Hegel, mere dissatisfaction with the political rule of the society and the endeavour for social change is not enough. Instead, one must have a better option for a social order to offer, so to say. Political criticism “must not irresponsibly condemn the actual state without putting something equally concrete in its place” (ibid.).

Nederveen Pieterse (2000, p. 199) also states that it is quite puritan to demand an all-encompassing revolution within the society through emancipation, and that in contrast to doing so we should rather set our eyes on the overall goal and to understand that realistic goals of emancipation customarily mean shaping the prevailing regulations and legislation. He claims that this is usually the general and even desirable path of affairs and that with time emancipatory actions will lead to more and more inclusive politics and eventually bring us closer to achieving the desired society. This seems to quite clearly distinguish him from a great deal of critical theorists such as Freire as they view the situation quite differently and claim that there cannot be meaningful emancipation within the prevailing systems but that there must be more of a revolution that would change the entire social structure that would be built on a different set of values and rules. Therefore we argue that a society can be metaphorically described to be much like a hermeneutic circle: as a society that is never ready and must always be prepared to shape itself according to the needs of the people. Furthermore, the society, too, is affected by power relations and is the product of history, and reflection on that history.

One important aspect to consider when examining critical theory and emancipation is its relation to Marxism. A great deal of critical theorists seem to have to an extent neglected Marx’s input as several of his claims were proved partly if not entirely false in the course of history. What critical theory shares with Marxism, however, is the focus on the systemic processes that create the society and its rules, and the struggle to change those structures and the prevailing power balance. (Ray, 1993.) Freire (1996, p. 90) also discusses the need for people to realise that they can create their own social order; that oppression is not and does not have to be a stable state of affair. Gottesman (2010, p. 381) outlines Freire’s thoughts on the relationship between critical thinking and social action and emphasises the importance of the process where people both understand that they are being oppressed and, as importantly, act upon changing their situation in cooperation with others.

Furthermore, Freire (1996) emphasises the need for communal action in the liberation process and states that it is impossible for one person in an oppressive society to become free without the help of others and without a collective activity. He presents the idea of the oppressed and the revolutionary leaders working side by side and thus forming a unified front where there would be no hierarchy between the two activist groups but rather a division of labour where, according to Freire, there still is a need for a group of leaders. In an oppressive environment, however, the only ones in charge are the oppressors who persecute and control the oppressed and thus make them into objects that have no free will. It is this libertarian education that emphasises the importance of people being in charge of their own thinking, forming their own opinions and ideas together with their community, in an atmosphere that supports that free constitution of the self. (Freire, 1996, pp. 29, 105-116.) Moreover, Freire (*ibid.*) believes that this kind of education should not be brought into a community by an outsider but it is something that should be developed in collaboration with the members of the community. Rolfe & Gardner (2006, p. 595) and Wiggins et al. (2009, p. 13) agree with Freire and summarise that there cannot be empowerment or emancipation that is *given* to a community by an outsider and that still remains meaningful for the oppressed, because that outsider will lack the community's knowledge and therefore cannot claim to fully understand their situation and all the aspects of empowerment and emancipation required for changing the situation. This is an interesting statement that requires more consideration. The starting point of PAR, as we will learn later in this thesis, is often an outside researcher entering a community and inquiring the need for a participatory action research project aiming at social change. Therefore, what we will later suggest in this thesis is in line with the thoughts of Freire, as well as of Rolfe, Gardner, Wiggins et al., in that PAR emphasises the need for collaboration with the members of the community, and in fact places their knowledge in the core of the entire process, but it also recognises the necessity of the contribution from the outside researcher(s). We will, however, ponder on this issue in more detail in the next chapter which discusses praxis and proposes the use of PAR as an emancipatory research approach.

Finally, while several researchers clearly see social change and even revolution as amiable goals, others have also introduced more critical voices regarding the objective of reaching

an ideal society. Plamenatz (1972, p. 49) claims that there is a fundamental paradox in the very process of revolution. According to him it is in fact quite impossible to reach the ideal society because it is likewise impossible to define the ultimate goals and wishes for the future society. Rather, as the process goes further along, those aims and ideas may change and thus it is again a different ideal society that is being aimed at. Additionally, it is exactly because of this long and complex process of slow transformation of society which should ensure that the new established ‘truths’ and norms are not defined by “any one group of privileged possessors of the truth” (Plamenatz, 1972, p.49). We find this view both problematic as well as encouraging. While we must agree with Hegel in his critique towards the very nature of emancipation as well as the process it takes in practice, and the problematic this creates, we also find the idea of a long process where no one sole group has the ultimate deciding power over what the ideals are—how ever good they may be—a soothing one as it predicts a more moderated and refined aims that have had the time to mature.

### 3.4.3. Individual, identity and emancipation

According to Inglis (1997, p. 2), it is crucial for the process of emancipation that the people who are supposedly being ‘emancipated’ understand the difference in the motivation of their actions; whether it derives from personal feelings of affection or love, or if it is rather a “social action deriving from power”. This takes us back to the discussion on norms and values set by the society as well as the intentions behind people’s actions. Räsänen (2006, p. 45) introduces the dilemma that absolute positive freedom brings along, i.e. the difficulty of choice and the anxiety that follows. Freedom has the potential to be distressing as well, and therefore people also tend to seek occasional rest from having to make choices. A great deal of people would gladly accept freedom but are more reluctant to accept responsibility along with it. He goes on to suggest that freedom can be looked at from two perspectives: that of an individual and of the society around that individual. Furthermore, mutual responsibility between these two must exist in order for freedom to exist in the first place. (Räsänen, 2006, p. 45.)

As stated earlier in this thesis, fear of freedom is a serious issue that potentially hinders both empowerment and emancipation. According to Freire (1996, pp. 28-29) the oppressed are often afraid of freedom because during the time that they have been oppressed, they have internalised the norms and values of the oppressive society and feel that they do not have the strength that is required to carry the responsibility for their own actions. Additionally, this fear of freedom can even lead into a situation where the oppressed becomes the oppressor as they do not know any other form of action but still follow the rules and norms set by the oppressors. (Freire, 1996, pp. 28-29.) Freire (1996, p. 111) also contributes to the discussion on objectifying the oppressed and denying them the chance to participate in the making of their history. It is when people are denied that possibility and they are made mere objects to be used and utilised that they lose their humanness and become truly oppressed.

What is more, for as long as the oppressed do not realise that they are being oppressed and unite, they can easily be dominated and manipulated by the oppressors. If, however, a large enough group of people realise their own situation and consequently decide to unite their powers to strive for emancipation, they have a better chance of not falling under the manipulation and domination of oppressors. (Freire, 1996, p. 126.) Freire (1996, p. 111) states that while it is idealistic to assume that one's mere realisation that one is being oppressed would mean emancipation from that oppression, it does mean that those people are in the beginning of their emancipatory process, in a kind of a pre-state of emancipation. We also believe that the fear of freedom derives from distorted power relations that have created such norms that have driven the oppressed to see themselves as incapable of handling the burden of responsibility. This is a fundamental contradiction concerning emancipation: the oppressed should be emancipated to see their full potential and abilities. However, this process is alas hindered by the oppressive past that has made the oppressed see themselves as objects rather than subjects, and that thus has made them too passive to dare strive for emancipation.

Plamenatz (1972, p. 31) concludes Hegel's thoughts on positive freedom by stating that a person is ever truly free only when also their will is free. They must be partakers in the social as well as ethical life in order to fully implement their freedom. Furthermore,

according to the Hegelian understanding of freedom, one is already free to an extent when one's mind is free. Thus it could be said that already the notion of wanting something and striving to achieve that aim can be described as a type of freedom that is, in fact, essential for all other types of freedom. Freedom is of no use if one does not realise they are 'free' or if that freedom stems from adopted norms that do not truly reflect the needs and wishes of the people but rather reinforces the oppressive norms. This brings us back to the discussion on the differences between empowerment and emancipation. In this thesis we have defined empowerment as actions that take place within the existing society and its norms without trying to change those norms, whereas emancipation has been seen as more of a liberating action where one challenges the prevailing norms and truths, and seeks to re-establish them to be meaningful and useful for everyone. According to this Hegelian view, then, is it not quite evident that empowerment by itself is not enough in the context of the oppressed? As stated earlier, we do not intend to claim that empowerment is useless as such. Rather, we propose that the direction it often takes is too narrow and is not meaningful as we wish to strive for a truly democratic society where people are encouraged to criticise and problematise the status quo.

#### 3.4.4. Relationship between empowerment and emancipation

As stated earlier, according to Hegel (as cited in Plamenatz, 1972, p. 45) the process of emancipation must begin with the freedom of mind.

“Progress towards freedom, as Hegel imagines it, is a long course of change in which man begins by accepting unquestioningly the social order and his place in it and therefore also the idea of himself that ‘reflects’ that place, then becomes estranged from it and withdraws into himself and his fantasies, until at last he is reconciled to it and to himself inside it. This movement is at once intellectual, moral and social; it is a growth in understanding, self-awareness and self-control, and also a gradual coming into existence of social forms suited to the needs and aspirations of intellectually and morally mature persons.” (Plamenatz, 1972, pp. 46-47.)

Plamenatz elaborates on this statement by arguing that this is all part of a personal growth that could be equated to empowerment where a person finds their own place in the society. This, however, seems to lack the emancipatory process, which seems so important to Hegel. On the other hand, this may only be a problem in the interpretation, and one should bear in mind that Hegel's ideal state nourishes one's full personal growth towards freedom and thus it can be assumed that this is the case with this statement as well, even if it at first seems more of an empowerment-concentrated one. (Plamenatz, 1972, pp. 46-47.) Furthermore, Plamenatz (1972, p. 32) states that according to Hegel, a person is only really a person when they take part in the social and ethical life of their society and that it is only in such a situation that a person is truly aware of their own identity and personality. However, "Hegel's point is not just that the individual acquires these capacities as a result of being in society with others but that there is something essentially social about the exercise of them" (ibid.). In addition, this works both ways: while it is as a partaker in ethical life that one truly becomes a person, it is also a crucial part of ethical life to recognise other people as persons as well.

Having deepened our discussion on the themes of power, empowerment, and emancipation, it has become clear to us that in the context of the oppressed emancipation provides us with more meaningful tools to strive for social change and change in the lives of the oppressed. While we recognise the importance of empowerment in this process, we argue that it by itself is not enough when the system within which empowerment works is oppressive by nature. However, we have also come to observe that a great many of the same themes apply to emancipation that apply to empowerment: the need to recognise the oppressive reality, fear of freedom, and the importance of analysing the relationship between the individual and the surrounding community, to mention a few. In the following chapters addressing praxis and PAR, we will take these theories to a more practical level and examine the possibilities but also limits of emancipatory research in the light of our findings so far.

## 4. FROM THEORY TO SOCIAL CHANGE

“Hands and minds should move in tandem in a new world alliance to reconstruct societies through humane globalizing initiatives.”

Orlando Fals Borda (2000, p. 633)

Thus far we have attempted to define the relationship between power, empowerment and emancipation. As stated earlier, our intention is not, however, to stay on the level of mere theorising. Instead, in this thesis we intend to propose a way to move from theorising to a more practical level, and suggest that the concept of praxis together with participatory action research (PAR) can potentially provide meaningful ways for bringing theory into life. To begin with, in this chapter, we will explore the idea of praxis, mostly following the Freirean understanding of the concept. Subsequently, we will examine the possibilities of participatory action research, including its benefits as well as challenges, in practising praxis towards social change.

### 4.1. Praxis

Praxis as a concept is extremely multidimensional. Similar to the concepts of empowerment and emancipation, praxis can be defined according to the context or the research interests of a scholar; fundamentally the term praxis can be formed to suit the desired purpose it is implemented in. To give a few examples, praxis is used to express a variety of discourses in disciplines such as political philosophy (e.g. Arendt, 1998), critical pedagogy (e.g. Freire, 1996), as well as classical philosophy by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (2000). For this very reason, it is rather challenging to define the overall concept of praxis; when trying to incorporate every aspect of praxis, one faces a jungle of paradigms and is therefore more likely to reach some sort of an ambiguous description of the term rather than an accurate definition. Consequently, in this thesis we will follow the predominant trend of defining praxis according to our research interests, and will focus on praxis in terms of social change, mainly outlined by Paulo Freire (1996).

Before doing that, however, we believe that in order to fully understand the versatility of praxis, it is important to give a concise introduction to the origins of the term, and from there begin to direct the formulation of the definition of praxis towards our focus point.

#### 4.1.1. From Aristotelian to Marxist praxis

The word praxis originates in the ancient Greece, in the writings of Aristotle, where the oldest known reference to praxis has been found. The Aristotelian praxis is a part of Aristotle's three types of human activity: *theoria*, *poesis*, and *praxis*, which all had different uses and purposes. *Theoria* refers to theoretical contemplation, the pursuit of truth and acquiring knowledge for the sake of enlightenment, whereas *poesis* points to concrete, goal-oriented, technical actions. Aristotelian praxis, on the contrary, does not aim to gain knowledge or to produce an object, but its goal is the knowledge created through practice and through that delivering morally valuable good to the surrounding world (Kemmis, 2010, pp. 9-10; Nolan, 2010, p. 726; Partridge, 2008, pp. 165-166; Tierney & Sallee, 2008, p. 676). In other words, praxis suggests that one knows what one is doing "in the doing of it" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 10), and that one performs activities in a morally relevant way (Partridge, 2008, p. 165).

Partridge (2008, pp. 165-166) discusses the differences between Aristotle's *theoria* and *praxis* in more detail. He argues that both *theoria* and *praxis* include a notion of a way of knowing about the world, but it is the knowledge and its implementations that make the distinction between the two types of Aristotle's human activity. Namely, the knowing in *theoria* involves "strenuous, disciplined, and highly circumscribed activity such as one observes in institutions" and "is valued for its pragmatic importance to persons whose rank, privilege, and power within the institution is dependent upon certain kinds of practice and knowledge" (p. 165). He continues by claiming that outside these institutions this knowledge is possibly unknown or even irrelevant to the mainstream audience. To put it differently, Partridge (*ibid.*) argues, that *theoria* is practiced purely for "its own sake". In contrast, Aristotle's *praxis* considers ethical and political theories and practice in the everyday life, and is therefore more closely related to the real world. In Aristotelian praxis,



there is a continuous interaction of theory and practice of social life, and that interaction enables the practitioner to make ethical and political decisions that are meaningful to both the practitioner and the others around him or her. (Partridge, 2008, pp. 165-166.)

After Aristotle, significantly later in history, Karl Marx also touched upon the topic of praxis, and he, too, saw praxis as a human activity and as a key factor in the seeking of human liberation. According to Marxist theory, praxis refers to creative human activity that includes elements of “‘happening-ness’, ‘sensuousness’, human-ness and sociality” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 11). Especially the ‘sensuousness’ of praxis highlights that praxis is, among other things, “*what actually happens* when people act and [...] the fact that it happens via human subjects who act” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 10). In his eleventh thesis in *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), Marx in fact criticises other philosophers for not genuinely exercising praxis by writing that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”, and thus voices a call for action by reminding that people can take actions to alter the status quo. In the light of the Marxist theory, praxis should, therefore, be the aim of all philosophy. (Kemmis, 2010, pp. 10-11; O’Leary, 2007, p. 209; Tierney & Sallee, 2008, p. 676).

Both Aristotle and Marx, thus, saw praxis as ultimately humane activity that has the potential to change the current reality. The Marxist view of praxis, however, includes a notion of being more practice-oriented and addressing the need for more radical actions to be taken in order to initiate a movement toward change in the society. Aristotelian praxis, instead, relies more on the pursuit of goodness in people. Praxis is indeed a human activity, coloured by its humane characteristics. The collaboration of theory and action is directed by the individual’s personality, worldview, ways of thinking and acting, among other factors, and thus, depending on the person, it may lead to surprising discoveries. We will continue to further mature this thought in the following discussions on praxis and PAR.

#### 4.1.2. Freirean praxis

For us the most inspiring theorist discussing praxis is Paulo Freire, whose definition of the concept will be used as the leading guideline for shaping our interpretation of praxis in further discussions. Originally published in Portuguese in 1968, titled *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addresses the need for critical awareness among the oppressed in order for them to be able to fight the oppressive situation they are facing and eventually emancipate themselves from domination. Freire (1996) calls for constant and responsible pursuit for freedom that is to be acquired by conquest. Freedom should not be a gift given to the oppressed, a fight fought *for* them, but rather a result of their mutual praxis and *conscientização*, critically recognising the oppressive situation and creating a new situation through transforming actions. True commitment to liberation must acknowledge men and women as conscious beings and rely on their ability to form critical conceptions of their surroundings. However, mere reflection on the oppressing situation is not enough for transforming the situation, but struggle for liberation requires action, too. Therefore, Freire (1996, e.g. p. 33) argues that liberation requires *praxis*, the combination of action and reflection. (Freire, 1996, pp. 29-36, 46-48, 60, 66-69, 87-89, 110-112.)

Freire (1996, pp. 68-69, 106-107), therefore, follows the thoughts of Aristotle in defining praxis as the union of action and reflection, the co-ordination of theory and practice, and emphasises that one of the two should not overrule the other. When discussing an essential element of liberating dialogue, i.e. the true word that is actually praxis and a tool that can transform the world, Freire (1996, pp. 68-69) identifies two elements of the true word. However, since the true word is praxis, Freire not only finds the two elements that together constitute the word but that also form praxis, namely action and reflection. He claims that the interaction of and the balance between action and reflection is necessary in order to reach true word/praxis. The notion of praxis is lost if either one of the two elements is overly emphasised. If reflection becomes dominant in the union of action and reflection, one resorts to mere verbalism, which Freire defines as an empty word, and not as real praxis that can transform the world, because there is no real possibility for making a change without action. Similarly, if action dominates the relationship, praxis is converted to pure activism which, again, leads nowhere on the path toward liberation.

In order to deepen our understanding of Freire's praxis, let us examine the work of Grundy (1987, pp. 104-106), who has identified five characteristics of the Freirean praxis. To begin with, she confirms our previous observations of the fact that praxis indeed consists of theory and practice, i.e. action and reflection, and demonstrates that praxis does not seek to establish a hierarchical or linear relationship between theory and action, where one comes first and dictates the other. Instead the two form an undividable union where theory is based on and builds upon action, and vice versa. Mayo (2004, pp. 48-49) has also studied Freire's idea of praxis and his writings confirm Grundy's statements: he affirms the essence of dialogue and co-operation between Freire's action and reflection, and sees their collaboration, and the praxis that results from it, as a prerequisite for transforming the reality.

Grundy (1987, p. 113), however, also remarks that praxis is not as simple as only acting upon something and reflecting about it, but praxis also involves the freedom to choose to "act in ways which are informed by critical social theorems". Nonetheless, even if the action is based on such theorems, one should not automatically assume that the action is the right thing to do. But the actions, as well as the theorems they are informed by, must become subjects of critical reflection since theory and practice must both be open to critical examination. This is why praxis engages in transforming the reality as well as our understanding of that reality, and never aims at maintaining the status quo. Instead, praxis incorporates the principle of understanding that reaching a certain goal is not a sign indicating that there is no more need to reflect and act upon the reality, but that the society is constantly changing and therefore it has to maintain its dynamism in order for it to be able to reach for its highest potential. As praxis shares the same goal with emancipation, i.e. challenging the current reality, the concepts are strongly related to each other, as well as to our research interests: combating oppression and achieving social justice. As a matter of fact, this thesis argues that there is an interdependent relationship between praxis and emancipation, as the latter cannot be achieved without the former and, according to the Freirean view of praxis, the former has no goal without the latter.

Secondly, Grundy (1987, p. 105) detects that praxis is always related to the real world, and never in an unreal or hypothetical environment. To prove her statement, she quotes Freire, who, while discussing the relevance of the liberation process for the oppressed, writes that

“The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people [i.e. the oppressed]. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action” (Freire, 1996, p. 76; Grundy, 1987, p. 105).

Thirdly, in accordance with the assumption of praxis only existing in the real world, Grundy (*ibid.*) reasons that Freire’s idea of praxis also entails that the real world is in fact the social and cultural world, namely the world of interaction, and therefore praxis can be seen as a form of interaction. Indeed, Freire (1996, e.g. p. 48, 66) repeatedly manifests that liberation can be reached only through dialogue in fellowship with others, and never in isolation. Consequently, praxis in fact is a call for the oppressed to enter into the world of dialogue with one another (Tierney & Sallee, 2008, p. 677). Grundy (1987, p. 105) continues by discussing the social world where praxis takes place, and observes that according to Freire (1996, p. 106), praxis exists in a constructed world where people emerge from the world, objectify it and form perceptions of it, and are capable of changing it through praxis. In this world, all the existing knowledge is not objective, but socially constructed. Grundy (1987, p. 105) thus concludes that praxis is “the act of reflectively constructing and reconstructing the social world”. This rationale constitutes the fourth point of her discussion on praxis, and is indeed one of the most significant ones, as it speaks about the true power of praxis and explains why praxis holds the potential to transform the reality; the Freirean praxis includes the notion that there are no absolute truths, but what people perceive as the truth is in fact a product of their social reality, and by questioning that reality, the people can begin to change it.

Consequentially, Grundy (1987, pp. 105-106) points out that the Freirean idea of praxis includes a process of meaning-making. As praxis recognises that there is no absolute or true meaning to something, but that meaning is socially constructed, meaning-making places the actors of praxis on the same page. To illustrate the role of meaning-making, Grundy reminds the reader of a section in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where Freire (1996, pp. 99-100) describes a group of tenement residents discussing a picture, presented to them by an adult literacy coordinator, where a drunken man was walking on the street and in a street corner there were three other men having a conversation. The intention of the coordinator was to address the issue of alcoholism, namely his interpretation of the picture, but the participants raised a discussion on feelings of identification with the drunk who, according to the participants, was doing his best to support his family with the low wage he earned, and occasionally wanted to escape the reality by consuming excessive amount of alcohol. The tenement residents claimed that by doing so the man wished to overcome his frustration, but at the same time they verbalised his actions, and similarly their own habits, as “an ultimately self-destructive solution” (Freire, 1996, p. 99). In other words, the meaning of the picture was remarkably different to the adult educator and to the residents of the tenement house, and this, Grundy (1987, pp. 105-106) argues, is exactly why meaning-making is crucial to praxis. Had it been the educator’s point of view that had been introduced to discussion, the participants had most likely missed the opportunity for critical reflection upon their own actions and reality. Mayo (2004, p. 49), too, writes that for Freire the starting point of a liberating process is always in the “here and now” of the oppressed; in the current situation where they come from, and which they are about to transform.

To conclude, the Freirean view of praxis includes the idea of praxis consisting of two parts: action and reflection which come together and engage in constant dialogue with each other. The aim of this dialogue is to change the current (oppressive) situation, and therefore praxis is strongly linked to theories of emancipation. Freire, however, has been criticised for being too abstract and ideological in his discussions on praxis (Tomperi & Suoranta, 2005), which is why we will continue to study praxis and examine how the concept is approached by more recent scholars.

#### 4.1.3. Broadening the concept of praxis

Praxis is also widely discussed in other contexts than Freire's, and many of the researchers not discussing Freire in particular but the concept of praxis in general (e.g. Nolan, 2010; Partridge, 2008; Tierney & Sallee, 2008) echo Freire's idea of praxis; they emphasise the union of theory and action, and confirm that it is in fact the union that is in the heart of praxis. Some scholars (e.g. Kemmis, 2010), however, disagree and highlight the active part of praxis and thus put more emphasis on action than on reflection. In this section, we will broaden our understanding of praxis by discussing the abovementioned scholars' views of praxis, as well as consider some of the critique presented against praxis in relation to our research aims.

Nolan (2010, p. 726) supports Freire's perspective on praxis, and states that while the concept of praxis acknowledges that there is a difference between action and reflection, i.e. theory and practice, it also assumes that there in fact is a relationship. This relationship between theory and practice is of a kind that is always changing and adapting to each individual situation, and therefore theory and practice are constantly in dialogue with each other. Most importantly, praxis never seeks to form a hierarchical order between the two, but praxis consists of an uninterrupted interplay between them. Additionally, praxis involves the idea of knowledge being socially constructed, and, as already discussed earlier in this chapter, the oppressed therefore have the ability to reconstruct their world and knowledge through praxis (Tierney and Sallee, 2008, p. 678). Partridge (2008, pp. 166-167) continues by arguing that praxis includes the notion of gaining knowledge, and claims that the knowledge needed for social transformation of a particular oppressed community can be gained only through direct participation in the social life of the community in question. This is because discovering the unspoken norms, such as power relations and economic forces, is possible only through praxis, i.e. being present in the community and reflecting upon the reality.

As described earlier, this thesis derives from our personal experiences among an oppressed group of girls living in a remote location in Northern Thailand. After spending some time and working with the hill tribe girls and afterwards doing extensive research about the

situation of the hill tribes residing in Thailand, we do not, however, claim to be experts on the hill tribes' lives. On the contrary, while we claim to have a rather holistic understanding of their current challenges, we agree with Partridge (2008) and recognise that the ones who are likely to possess the greatest degree of knowledge about their situation and who can analyse it most authentically are the hill tribes themselves. Therefore, working towards social change in their context has to begin with their own praxis, namely the hill tribe communities engaging in reflecting and acting upon their reality in order to transform it. This can be done in collaboration with, for instance, a NGO or researchers, who are conscious and sensitive to their role as facilitators rather than the executors of the process.

Partridge (2008, pp. 164-168), too, draws attention to the necessity of both action and reflection. Consequently, he suggests that praxis leads its practitioners away from resorting to radicalism or revolution when striving for emancipation, and guides them to consider honest interaction and true dialogue between different stakeholders. According to this vision, social transformation and a stable and just future can be achieved solely through peaceful negotiations. Partridge (2008, p. 168) admits that this approach has its weak point in its assumption of democracy. In order for the oppressed to be able to engage in mutual dialogue with their oppressors, they would need constitutional rights to voice their opinions, to take part in discussions, to disagree and to negotiate. Without the framework of democratic values, and a functioning democratic environment, the state of mutual dialogue and consensus is most likely not achieved, and more radical actions may be needed.

This brings us back to the initial discussion on the relation between power and emancipation. In the case of the hill tribes, for instance, the assumption of democracy is indeed a challenge, since the hill tribes are deprived from the power and democratic possibilities to emancipate themselves from their oppressive reality. While negotiations may eventually lead to improvements of the hill tribe's situation, radical changes in the power structures are nonetheless required. As long as there are no concrete attempts made to establish consensus and respectful relationship between the hill tribes and the Thai officials, the possibility for democratic negotiations for emancipation remains rather

idealistic if not utopian, and a self-directed intervention or radical actions of some sort is required from the hill tribes in order to redress the power imbalances. Therefore, although we do not support radicalism and find keeping praxis within the category of democratic ways for action an attractive path, we hesitate to agree with Partridge (2008) in limiting praxis to democracy, because often in the case of oppression, democratic influencing is not a realistic option.

Another challenge of praxis is presented by Kemmis (2010, p. 11), who criticises the academic efforts made to define praxis in a theoretical manner. Although he acknowledges the importance of theory in praxis, Kemmis emphasises the role of action. In fact, he does not discuss purely praxis, but what he calls “practice/praxis”, a concept he has created to put more weight on the active side of praxis, and to describe the “happening-ness” of praxis. While doing so, Kemmis questions the attempt to define praxis through theoretical frameworks because resorting to plain theory risks losing the idea of practice in praxis and forgetting the importance of taking concrete actions to make a change. He argues that the idea of praxis is to do and to act in the world, and not merely to “engage in discourse about it” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 11). Tierney and Sallee (2008, pp. 677-678) have also examined praxis in terms of research, and they, like Freire, establish a link between praxis and social change. According to their view, a commitment to helping oppressed people and working towards changing the oppressive reality is always present in the concept of praxis, even in research. Similarly, Partridge (2008, p. 165), who also considers praxis to be a combination of theory and practice, argues that praxis is consistently and ultimately concerned with changing the status quo. There is, therefore, a partial agreement with Kemmis (2010) among the supporters of the Freirean idea praxis; Tierney and Sallee (2008, p. 678), for instance, propose that when praxis is used in research to analyse the oppressive reality and to formulate a theory for combating oppression, the main goal of praxis, namely social transformation, should not be forgotten.

In this thesis, we see praxis as a confluence of theory and action. Even though we agree with Kemmis (2010) that there is a real danger in theorising the concept and forgetting the active part of praxis in the process, especially when doing research, we also agree with the Freirean view of praxis in that in the same way as action shapes theory, theory also helps to



produce better models for action. It is not about which of the two comes first, but about how both are equally necessary and how the two come together and create a unified entity. In the context of this thesis, we argue that reaching the emancipation of the oppressed requires that action and theory are woven together, and that they continue to revise and remodel each other along the way towards emancipation.

Finally, Wakefield (2007, pp. 334-338, 344-349) also sees praxis as a dynamic union of theory and practice, and she relates praxis with taking action for a cause and with making a change, i.e. combining ideology and practice. She has explored different forms of praxis based on whether they occur inside or outside the academy or if they bridge the distance between the inside and the outside. She argues that breaking down the barriers between the academy, namely the university, and the outside, the so-called real world, is important in order for the academics not to lose touch with the reality and its complex political and social relationships, and because praxis is not separate from either the academic or the personal life of the activist-researcher. The bridging of the gap between the inside and the outside, Wakefield (2007, pp. 346-349) argues, could be achieved by combining the roles of the academic and the activist, by bringing the academy closer to the reality and the reality closer to the academy. She suggests that at its best (critical) praxis

“serves to bridge the distance between academics and others, so that the oppressed are *no longer* distant or strangers but rather colleagues and companions and occasionally co-conspirators. This is not to say that it should be taken for granted that these bonds are always reciprocal, or that the differences in power and status between academics and those in marginalized positions can be erased. Instead, it is a call to try and create relationships through praxis that challenge existing structures of domination and simultaneously bring joy and respect into the lives of the people participating in those relationships” (Wakefield, 2007, p. 349).

As academics ourselves, we find it interesting that Wakefield (2007) refers to the differences in power and status relationships between people engaged in praxis. While we agree with Wakefield in acknowledging that such contradictions and relations are likely to

exist between the academy and ‘the others’, or rather in the context of this thesis the outside researcher(s) and the oppressed, and agree that forgetting them is by no means an easy task, we also criticise those relations and are reluctant to state that setting them aside cannot or should not be pursued. Instead, we would like to see it as the task of both the researcher(s) and the oppressed to address ‘the elephant in the room’ by making the power relations visible and strive for diminishing their effects. This discussion leads us to consider the potential residing in participatory action research (PAR) which as a research approach in fact suggests that the power and status relations between the ‘academy’ and the oppressed can be set aside. In the following section about PAR, we will continue the discussion of power relations and how they affect praxis and PAR, and we suggest that PAR can potentially provide a successful solution for exercising praxis: for bringing theory into life and for establishing a concrete co-operational relationship between research and action.

#### **4. 2. Participatory action research (PAR)**

Numerous researchers willing to contribute to the redressing of the power imbalances and cases of oppression within the global communities have referred to participatory action research when envisioning the possibility of social transformation. Previously in this thesis, we have defined the concept of praxis, and in this section we intend to illustrate how theory and action can meet in practice. In line with the words of Fals Borda (2000) and Freire (1996), we believe that praxis is in the core of a real chance for social transformation, and that participatory action research can prove to be a valid and useful tool in exercising praxis, the union of theory and action, in practice. We therefore suggest that PAR can create a fruitful basis for combating oppression and working together to establish a society that is based on social justice, equity, and mutual respect.

Participatory action research, as such, is a term that embodies a broad variety of practices. Different scholars refer to an approach very similar to or exactly like participatory action research with a variety of terms such as ‘participatory and action research’ (Lykes & Mallona, 2008), ‘community-based participatory research’ (Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011), and ‘participatory (action) research, i.e. PR/PAR (Rahman, 2008). These varying approaches may have adopted slightly differing perspectives or focus points, but they all

share the same goal, namely social justice through social change. In this thesis, while defining PAR, we will therefore use the expression ‘participatory action research’ as an umbrella term that more or less covers the slightly differing research approaches and concentrates on their similarities rather than differences. We will begin with a more general definition of PAR, and from there we will embark on the journey of working towards forming our own understanding of PAR. While doing that, however, we do not intend to stay within the limits of a certain approach to PAR, but instead, we will take the freedom to compare and combine different strategies and merge them together in order to create the most promising recipe for PAR that is beneficial for and fits the needs of our research aims.

#### 4.2.1. Approaching the origins of PAR

Participatory action research refers to a collaborative practice or research approach in which the community or the people under study are involved in and actively participating in the research as co-researchers with outside-originating researcher(s). The starting point of PAR is always the reality of the research participants: their knowledge and everyday experiences which are identified, examined and reflected on during the research process. Differing from classical types of research, however, the goal of PAR is not merely to describe the native reality, but to aim at questioning and changing it, and ultimately at producing social justice. In other words, PAR aims at social transformation, and is often targeted at communities facing discrimination and oppression. (Cahill, 2007, pp. 268-269; Lykes & Mallona, 2008, p. 106, 117; Koirala-Azad. & Fuentes, 2009-2010, p. 1; O’Neill, 2004, pp. 14-15; Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 154; Rahman, 2008, p. 49; Whyte et al., 1991, pp. 20-21.)

The origins of participatory action research can be traced to different areas around the world during different periods of time. In other words, the roots of PAR cannot be specifically located at a certain place, partly because of the varying interpretations of the concept, but there are different trends of PAR that have emerged in a variety of contexts in Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as in different parts of the American continent. (Fine,

2008, p. 218; Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 154; Rahman, 2008, pp. 50-52.) According to Rahman (2008, pp. 50-51), for instance, the earliest references to PAR can be traced back to Germany in the late 1960s when Heinz Moser wrote about the growth of ‘emancipatory research’. In this context PAR had found its basis in ongoing political changes, and was linked to transferring new political philosophies into research strategies.

Our main purpose, however, is not to describe the various occasions from where PAR has emerged, and it is therefore not meaningful to list all different birthplaces or every trend of PAR that occurred around the globe in 1960s and 1970s. Instead, to illustrate these trends, we will take a peek into the Latin American and the Asian origins of PAR, namely those origins that seem to most closely correspond with our previous discussion on praxis and social change. Additionally, we will briefly compare the so-called Northern and Southern traditions of PAR in order to understand their difference and locate our own understanding of PAR between the two traditions.

To begin with, Orlando Fals Borda (2000, p. 626) argues that the birth place of PAR is Latin America in the 1970s. He criticised the Latin American trend in action research of imposing the outside researchers’ views and ‘out of the context’-originated theories on the local people. Consequentially, he called for another type of action research that would grant the ownership of the research inquiries to the local people and make it possible for them to engage in autonomous reflection on their reality in a collaborative partnership with the researcher. From this argument, a new type of action research, PAR, was developed: it is the type that acknowledges the indigenous knowledge and life experience and celebrates the true companionship between the (outside) researcher(s) and the community under study by uniting them into a collaborative research team. (Fals Borda, 2000, pp. 625-626; Rahman, 2008, pp. 50-51.)

At the same time in India, Rahman et al. articulated their “vision of an alternative paradigm of rural development with people's collective self-initiatives as the core of this thinking” (Rahman, 2008, p. 51). Rahman’s team undertook a research project in co-operation with the leaders and other key members of an oppressed group trying to restore

their own political self-determination, as well as with a number of other external activists. As the research evolved, the task of the research participants, who were outsiders to the oppressed community, was to promote the people's intellectual self-thinking. The outsider researchers were sought for guidance, and never for orders for action, by the community leaders and cadre. By appreciating the community's skills to reflect upon their situation and trusting their ability to make informed decisions based on their observations, Rahman's research team steered away from plain rural development, and followed the path of social change with praxis and PAR, previously laid out by Freire and Fals Borda, among others. (Rahman, 2008, pp. 51-52.)

Pontes Ferreira and Gendron (2011, pp. 154-155) introduce a slightly differing historical view of PAR by identifying two original roots of participatory action research. The first one is action research that is referred to as the Northern Tradition, its father being a German psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, who with his successors rejected the positivist orientation of science and introduced a new research approach that included community members as co-researchers. The second root is participatory research, referred to as the Southern Tradition, which originates from Asia, Africa, and especially from Latin America where applications of Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy were planned in the 1960s and 1970s. Originally, the Northern Tradition was more interested in knowledge creation among the community, whereas the Southern Tradition possessed strong emancipatory and revolutionary features of Latin American social movements, and this division in fact still exists on some level (Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 157). While we acknowledge that the Northern and Southern traditions can be seen to be located at the opposite ends of the continuum, and that it can be argued that there are essential ideological differences among the two approaches (Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 156), we address the need for both knowledge creation and emancipatory actions, i.e. theory and action which constitute praxis, as collaborative elements in implementing a successful participatory action research project aiming at social change and a more just society. Therefore, in the following discussion, we will focus on the underlying common themes between the two ends and locate our definition of PAR somewhere between them, instead of favouring one approach and plainly excluding the other.

#### 4.2.2. Defining PAR

In the concluding lines of their article, O'Neill et al. (2004, pp. 14-15) describe PAR with the following statement:

“Methodologically and epistemologically PAR is involved in the production of social justice. But the point about PAR methodology is not solely to advance analytical or theoretical understanding, but to be itself an impetus towards greater social justice.”

Consequently, as the aim of participatory action research is not only to name the local reality, but to thoroughly examine and change it, PAR has the potential to produce new subjectivities, and ultimately new societal order that is not based on unequal power relations and oppression, but on social justice. In line with the thoughts of Freire, who stated that problem-posing education “affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (1996, p. 65), PAR problematises the idea of realities and statuses that are carved in stone and therefore remain ever intact, and encourages the oppressed to study and question what they conceive as normal. For example, a PAR project that is involved in issues of unequal distribution of power, should aim at examining and understanding power as an omnipresent, context-dependent, and ever-changing phenomenon, and not as a commodity owned by a certain individual or a group of people. (Cahill, 2007, pp. 268-270, 275).

Thus, the basis of a PAR process always lies in the local status quo as experienced by the local research participants, as well as in the concerns that rise from those experiences. This presumption is in fact one of the main principles of PAR; the local people are the experts of their own lives since they are the ones who have acquired the greatest deal of knowledge of their reality by experiencing it. (Cahill, 2007, p. 268; Cahill et al., 2008, p. 98; Fine, 2008, p. 215; Morell, 2008, p. 157, Montero, 2000, p. 138). Montero (2000, pp. 136-137), while discussing the epistemological perspective of PAR, states that knowledge is not constructed solely by individuals, but by the relations in which the individuals are and where the ‘we’ is constructed. In other words, communities possess a great deal of communal knowledge, let alone values and beliefs, that can be difficult to apprehend and master for an outside researcher. Let us here return to our earlier discussion on praxis,

where we agreed with Partridge (2008) in that in order to be able to truly speak about praxis, one has to hold deep knowledge and understanding of the situation under study. As we have argued that praxis is a key figure on the journey towards the removal of oppression, and that PAR can work as a tool for moving from the theoretical level of praxis to acting praxis, it is necessary to recognise the value of the local knowledge and take it seriously, instead of attempting to impose the researcher's (differing) views and perspectives on the research agenda, no matter how legitimate the researcher finds them.

As a result, the local participants should be involved in addressing the problem to be studied and participate in formulating the research questions, as well as in collecting and analysing the data, along with in framing the interpretations of the research (Cahill et al., 2008, p. 98). In order to reach the stage of authentic dialogue, however, the outside researcher(s) and the community have to first reserve enough time for relationship and trust building, as it is rather naïve to assume that right from the point of the first meeting, the co-operation in addressing as big issues as oppression and power relations would run smoothly between previously unknown partners, let alone the correspondence being filled with confidence and trust in the other's agenda. Thus, it is essential to take enough time for getting to know each other and the other's ways of thinking and acting, as well as building mutual relationships based on trust and respect before embarking on the research project itself.

In their definition of PAR, Tuck et al. (2008, p. 51) provide a list of five points that they consider as the recipe for PAR and for ensuring participation of the local community. Firstly, the research should be transparent in all of its matters. Secondly, the research-questions should be co-constructed together with all the research participants, and thirdly, the project design as well as the design of research methods should be mutually discussed and decided on. Following from this, the fourth requirement is that all research data should be analysed together, and finally, the research product should be interactive and dynamic, and it should be constructed together. (Tuck et al., 2008, p. 51.) As we see it, however, the list only presents the minimum requirements for collaboration in PAR. Therefore, we would be reluctant to utilise a concept of PAR that is based on such kind of lists as we fear

that limiting oneself to a list of requirements may lead to forgetting the essence of PAR, namely working together with an emancipatory goal in mind.

Cahill et al. (2008, p. 98), inter alia, emphasise the fact that in order to call the research process participatory action research, *all* the participants must be involved in *all* stages of the process. While we obviously agree with the abovementioned demand for participation in PAR, we hesitate to consider the ‘*everyone* participating in *all* stages’ paradigm as a condition for PAR, because we think there is a paradox in this expectation: there can usually be only one person, or a small group of people, who come up with the idea of PAR and introduce it to a larger audience. Firstly, at this point it is appropriate to ask if it is always the outside researcher who enters the community the one to propose PAR, or can the community ask a researcher to join them in conducting PAR? We certainly find both options probable, although the literature on PAR tends to assume the first option to always be the case. Nevertheless, no matter who introduces the idea of PAR, there is always someone or a small group of people, and they alone, who makes the initiative. Only after the idea of PAR has been presented, everyone can be said to start taking part in the process. Being obedient with the condition that everyone should be involved in *all* stages, is presenting the idea of PAR then not part of the process? We would like to think that the process starts from the introduction and maturation of the idea, and it is in fact in this way of thinking where the paradox lies; in order to truly practice PAR, everyone should be involved in all stages, whereas at the same time it is practically almost impossible for everyone to be involved in some stages, e.g. the initial stage of discovering PAR. Additionally, especially in case of a larger community and a protracted PAR process, the likelihood for partial participation in different stages of the process by a variety of individuals increases. Therefore, although we agree that ideally *everyone* should be involved in *all* stages of PAR, we also acknowledge that this assumption can lead to rather unrealistic and romantic visioning of PAR.

However, as the main point of PAR as a research approach is to include the community in the making of the research and spreading expertise, then all of the participants are at the same time teachers and learners (Cannella, 2008, p. 190). In PAR, no hierarchical relationship between different knowledges exists, but all perspectives are considered as



equals, and this principle enables true dialogue that is in the core of praxis. When describing his liberating pedagogy, Freire (1996, p. 53) refers to teacher-students and student-teachers in order to illustrate the dialogical and non-authoritarian relationship between the teacher and the students and their knowledges. Similarly, in a PAR project, the researcher and the research participants engage in a mutual learning process in which knowledges are exchanged both ways, and the outside researcher and the community members and their respective expertise are regarded as equals, even though the community's reality has the status as the starting point of the process. Therefore, in accordance with Freire's thoughts, it can be argued that the researcher turns into a researcher-participant and the participant into a participant-researcher.

As the research becomes a collective experience, the role of the researcher is consequently not as clear-cut as in many other types of research. First of all, Montero (2000, p. 138) argues that often the training that researchers receive leads them to think about the target community as a group that *needs* to be informed or educated because they are somehow misinformed or incapable to understand. Such an approach, however, is likely to be taken as an unwanted intervention by the local community and may therefore lead to feelings of unworthiness and disempowerment among the community members. Relevant ethical questions related to an intervention, however, are raised when an outside researcher faces a practice naturalised by the community that the researcher considers to be dangerous. Such a practice can be identified in the case of the hill tribes, for instance, as over time they have adopted child labour as an everyday practice. Although locally for the hill tribes child labour may be a normal and, above all, a necessary way of life, globally the practice is ethically very questionable. In cases like that of the hill tribes, Montero (2000) suggests that paradox of the need for intervention while at the same time avoiding it can be overcome by practicing praxis through PAR:

“the outside researcher has to inform the people using active and participatory means and techniques, discussing the problem with them in such a way that a reflective process is produced, leading thus to a conscientisation process (consciousness raising, although instead of ‘raising’, it is more suitable to speak of a consciousness movement), and because of that, to the people conscious participation [in facing the problem]” (pp. 138-139).

Secondly, since PAR is based on the knowledge mainly produced by the community participants, the researcher has to forget their position as an expert of their field. Instead of acting as the single disciplinary expert in the research team, the researcher can contribute to the research process by being the facilitator or consultant (Whyte et al., 1991, p. 40; cf. Rahman, 2008, pp. 51-52) for the community members in order to enable unbiased dialogue and avoid establishing hierarchical knowledge or expertise relationships inside the research team. This is not to say that the researcher should withhold from providing any scholarly viewpoints, as they are considered as equal research participants, but that the researchers ought to be sensitive toward the discussion and try not to guide the other research participants to a desired direction. By avoiding the means of intervention and manipulation and instead letting the community members themselves discover the challenges of their reality, the ownership of the discovery, as well as of the efforts to face the challenges and change the reality are given to the community. The sense of ownership, naturally, reinforces participation in PAR, and is likely to increase motivation for and belief in the project.

Thus, it becomes evident that PAR requires a great deal of commitment, time and courage from the researchers (Cannella, 2008, p. 189). All of the researcher participants undertaking a PAR project are asked for commitment in praxis, i.e. in action and theory: commitment to each other as research partners, commitment to knowledge creation and reflexivity, commitment to the surrounding community and society, commitment to social change, justice and fairness, etc. Additionally, a researcher engaging in PAR should be prepared and willing to follow previously unfamiliar pathways and accept the unstructured and sometimes even confusing nature of PAR. Due to these features of PAR, it cannot be guaranteed that certain kinds of research results are produced as an outcome of participatory action research. Cannella (2008, p. 191, 207) portrays PAR as a personal experience for each individual and clarifies that not all participants learn the same thing. Accordingly, returning back to our definition of praxis and the assumption that PAR incorporates praxis, we have earlier described praxis as a human activity and consequentially each act of praxis being characterised by the individual practising praxis. As a result, the learning results of PAR are likely to be unforeseeable and often also

intangible. The difficulty to provide a concrete description of the research results constitutes another ambiguity of PAR which the researchers should be able to explain to themselves as well as the possible funders of the project.

Evidently, most PAR projects are conducted with marginalised communities as PAR includes empowering elements and is often seen to be a useful tool in the process of empowerment (Morell, 2008, pp. 158-159). Ginwright (2008, p. 21) observes that PAR also plays a role in fostering hope, imagination, and action in realities that appear permanent as it presents the oppressed with unique opportunities to understand how dreams and visions can potentially be transformed to emancipatory actions. Cannella (2008), while discussing youth in American education system, confirms Ginwright's observation on the advantages of PAR by stating that the faith in the local people and their abilities shown by the organisers of the PAR project is an investment of social resources to the participants that "seeks to compensate for the constricting environment" (p. 192) that they experience in their reality.

However, we have previously agreed that empowerment alone does not offer a sufficient solution to the situation that the oppressed live in, and have consequently shifted our goal towards emancipation which can be reached through praxis. Naturally, empowerment is needed in the process as it is the first step on the path to emancipation. The task of PAR is to take empowerment to the next level and help the oppressed in their quest for emancipation. In fact, the political potential of PAR, according to Cahill et al. (2008, p. 93), lies in the life experiences voiced by the marginalised people. The authors refer to Martin Luther King who argued that America will not be free before it frees black people from oppression, and apply King's philosophy to PAR's task of including the structurally excluded voices and perspectives. Similarly, Freire (1996, pp. 25-26, 66) has stated that dehumanisation is a key element in the unjust order of oppression and therefore one cannot be truly human while preventing others from being so. In accordance with this thought, PAR provides its participants a chance to *unlearn* the paradigms that dehumanise others, and therefore also themselves (Cannella, 2008, pp. 190-191). Cahill et al. (2008, p. 93) hope that documenting through PAR what the oppressed experience will help to illuminate

the challenges of the society they live in and point in the direction of the possibility of social change.

Finally, Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998, pp. 21-24) recapitulate the central features of PAR in seven points. To begin with, as the first feature they introduce the so-called Lewinian spiral of self-reflective cycles which includes four repetitive phases of planning, acting and observing, reflecting, and re-planning. The four phases rotate in a down-ward cycle, similar to the hermeneutic circle, and continue to shape and remodel each other. It has to be noted here, however, that, in the light of our earlier identification of Kurt Lewin as one of the founders of *action research*, the Lewinian cycle is originally created to depict the faces of action research, and not directly those of PAR. Kemmis and Wilkinson (ibid.) accurately criticise the wide-spread assumption that the self-reflective spiral is a dominant feature of PAR, and alternatively offer six additional key features of PAR to describe its multifariousness; the six features portray PAR as a social process, as participatory, as practical and collaborative, as emancipatory, as critical, and finally as recursive, reflexive and dialectical. As we have so far discussed most of these features, the six points neatly summarise what we already know about PAR. Kemmis and Wilkinson's observation of PAR as a social process, however, deserves more attention.

Even though we have previously touched upon the subject, we have not yet thoroughly defined the social aspect of PAR. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998, p. 23) cite the work of Habermas (1992, p. 26) who observes that individualisation and socialisation are interdependent since there is no socialisation without individualisation, and vice versa. In accordance with this assumption, PAR considers the relationship between the individual and the larger social context and seeks to understand how one affects the other; PAR encourages its participants to examine how they shape each other as individuals and as a community, and how the broader context or setting influences their formation as individuals. PAR is, therefore, inevitably a social process. (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p. 23.) Additionally, previously we have discovered that all knowledge is a product of social interaction and that collective reflection of the reality at its best introduces new perspectives to the earlier way of knowing, which also reinforces the perception of PAR as a social process. Similar to Freire's (1996, p. 48) liberation pedagogy, for instance, PAR is

not an act that can be exercised in isolation from others, but PAR as a fundamentally social and collaborative process necessitates a group of people, a unitary team, who can join in practicing praxis and aiming at reaching emancipation and social justice together.

In the beginning of this chapter, we intended to formulate a definition of PAR that we would consider to most accurately suit our research aims, namely practising praxis for emancipation/social change. We have now reached to the point where we, based on the presented literature, will present our perception of PAR. According to our understanding, praxis is the core of PAR which does not only aim at knowledge creation and authentic descriptions of the current reality, but also at changes in the oppressive reality and at emancipation through critical analysis of the reality—through reflecting and acting upon the reality. Moreover, PAR always originates in the community and in the community's lived experiences, and continues to be community-based and community-oriented in all of its aspects. As a social and participatory approach, PAR shows respect to and trust in the community's knowledge and expertise, and unites the community members as well as the outside researcher(s) in seamless co-operation, committed to working together from the beginning of the process to the end. This co-operation includes a notion of it at the same time being a mutual learning experience for all participants, in which all parties act simultaneously as teachers and as learners engaging in a joint learning process.

In other words, PAR provides a platform on which the research participants can begin to unlearn their current reality and its restricting paradigms, and intends to encourage its participants to regenerate theory in action, as well as action in theory, by exercising praxis. By participation, i.e. involving the community under study into the research process, the ownership of the research is moved from an outside researcher to the community itself, and PAR can therefore be expected to produce meaningful, effective, and long-lasting results that contribute toward social change. Differing from the so-called traditional research approaches, however, PAR as a process is not simple to undertake or concretise. First of all, PAR asks a lot from its participants in terms of commitment and courage, for instance, as it takes the researchers in an unforeseeable and unstructured adventure that can take surprising courses along the way. Secondly, as PAR does not aim to generate certain types of research findings, but the focus is turned to the learning and empowering experiences of

each individual research participant as well as of those of the whole community, the design and findings of PAR are impossible to predict beforehand. In the following section, we will take a closer look at the differences between what we call the traditional research and PAR, and examine how the classical requirements concerning a piece of research, namely those of validity, objectivity, and generalisability, can be applied to PAR.

#### 4.2.3. On validity, objectivity and generalisability of PAR

PAR is not a typical research methodology, but rather a method that aims at transforming realities. Therefore, there is a sharp contrast between PAR and the conventional models of pure research in which a researcher enters a community in order to study the community members as passive subjects and where the only model of participation is likely to be the authorisation of the researcher's project by the community leader (Whyte et al., 1991, p. 20), and thus PAR must "move beyond restrictive notions of scientific inquiry" (Ginwright, 2008, p. 15). Cammarota and Fine (2008, pp. 5-6) discuss the difference between PAR and the so-called traditional research: they identify five fundamental factors that distinct PAR from the conventional models of research: the researcher as a participant, the researchers as insiders, the participants as critical race researchers, the criticality of the knowledge gained from the research, and finally the active nature of knowledge.

As discussed before, in PAR the researcher rejects their position as an expert or as a lone investigator and instead adopts a role as an equal participants working together with the community members. Therefore the references to the researcher and the participants are used more or less as synonyms as they point to everyone involved in PAR, which constitutes a major difference between PAR and 'traditional research'. In line with the first point, in PAR all of the research participants are, at least to some extent, the stakeholders within the community, and as 'insiders' they have acquired essential knowledge to be able to analyse their situation. Naturally, the outside researcher is, at least partly, inclined and expected to rely on the community's knowledge and expertise, in the same way as the community relies on the researcher's knowledge on some other issues. Thirdly, the participants of PAR are often critical race researchers following the trend of

intersectionality, as they aim to examine power relations through different perspectives, and thus attempt to form a holistic understanding of power and issues relating to power relations. As a result, the issues of e.g. race and racism are often intersected with gender and class, for instance. (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, pp. 5-6.)

The last two differing characters deal with knowledge gained from PAR. Cammarota and Fine (2008, pp. 5-6) argue that the critical nature of knowledge as well as its active character especially distinguish PAR from 'traditional' research approaches. By 'the critical nature of knowledge' they point to the fact that the research findings of PAR are expected to address progressive changes of power relations and improve the social conditions of the studied reality, and 'the activity of knowledge' refers to PAR working as an impetus for ideas, plans, and actions initiating social change. The role of community-based knowledge, namely the perception of PAR knowledge being socially constructed and found within the communities rather than being 'scientifically based', makes PAR an "*epistemological challenge* to the traditions of social science" (Fine, 2008, p. 215). This is because participatory action researchers challenge the position of traditional science as the only source of valid information, and by contrast recognise that knowledge exists everywhere, although it may be different type of knowledge than produced by science.

Additionally, participatory action researchers deviate from their colleagues practicing positivist research in that participatory action researchers consider no research to be neutral or value-free, and thus PAR cannot directly answer to the positivists' questions of objectivity of the research findings. On the contrary, PAR relies on dialogical argumentation and considers the 'truth' to be a matter of consensus as opposed to something that can be measured or verified by a set of externally determined standards. In PAR, objectivity is addressed by recognising and admitting the existence of values and predispositions that affect and even tend to direct the course of the research. Fine (2008) calls such an approach *strong objectivity* and clarifies that the biases are not supposed to be hidden, but they should be placed under display and questioning in order to be able to overcome the restrictions of the current reality. (Fine, 2008, pp. 221-223; Morell, 2008, p. 159; Rahman, 2008, p. 50, 55.)

This leads to the point of validity already touched upon earlier in this thesis, namely that in PAR it is not possible to ensure that in advance determined phenomena will be examined or that desired outcomes are attained from the research process. Firstly, this is because before a PAR project is launched, it is impossible to decide on the topics that the research will deal with. Secondly, as the design of PAR does not obligate it to be scientifically based and the aims of PAR differ from those of ‘traditional research’, expecting results similar to a traditional research project is not relevant to PAR. (Cannella, 2008, p. 189.) Instead, the validity or credibility of PAR stems from the reality as experienced by the research participants. This is one of the main reasons why PAR is likely to be criticised for not being a genuinely scholarly approach. PAR, however, aims to “honour and develop these varied bases of knowledge” by explicitly troubling the “hegemonic and hierarchical assumptions about who is the expert” (Fine, 2008, p. 223). In other words, PAR aims at democratising the validity of expertise, and questions the assumption of knowledge gained through scientific inquiry alone having the status of higher knowledge or ultimate expertise.

Finally, in contrast to the general appeal to the statement of generalisability of research findings, PAR, being strongly context-dependent, can seldom produce results that could be directly applied to a number of other contexts. As opposed to the traditional desire for direct and technical extension of research findings, Fine (2008, pp. 227-229) leads us to consider *provocative generalisability* in which a piece of research provokes thoughts in its audience and encourages them to rethink and reimagine their current reality and act upon it. We agree with Fine, and argue that although PAR deviates from the ‘traditional’ research in questions of validity, objectivity and generalisability, it can still be considered as a valid research approach that does address the abovementioned issues by modifying them from their traditional sense to fit the underlying philosophies of PAR.



#### 4.2.4. Challenges of PAR

PAR, as any other research method, however, does not come without challenges. To begin with, the term participation in PAR is used rather loosely to describe a variety of practices which in fact can reveal to be far from participatory (Cahill, 2007, p. 269). Fals Borda (2000, pp. 631-632), for example, remarks there is a danger that the concept of participation is adopted to replace the term 'development' (which can bear a negative connotation) by dominant agencies, and participation would consequently transform into means of incorporation or manipulation. In such cases, PAR would not be aiming at initiating emancipation, but at fostering oppression by reproducing social hierarchies and the prevailing hegemonic agenda (Cahill, 2007, p. 269). Therefore, Fals Borda (2000, pp. 631-632) argues that the flexible concept of participation has to be carefully defined to correspond with the language of needs of the oppressed. To briefly recapitulate, we have previously stated that in the context of this thesis, participation is understood as the co-operation between all participants, as well as the giving of ownership of the PAR process to the community by ensuring that the research starts off being community-based and continues to be community-oriented and show respect to the community's knowledge throughout the whole process.

Following from this, Cahill (2007, p. 269) sees a dilemma in the tendency of participatory action researchers to overly foreground local community knowledge, despite the fact that while doing so they risk losing sight of the broader processes that interact and have an effect on the community's reality. She argues that the problem should be taken seriously and addressed in a PAR process that deals with issues of power, inequalities, and social change. We agree with Cahill in that this indeed constitutes a valid critique that should be taken into consideration during the PAR process. Nevertheless, we also have strong faith in the power of authentic dialogue that leads to praxis; we believe that as an equal research participant, the outside researcher is entitled and expected to introduce the abovementioned broader structural processes to the discussion in case they are left unregistered by the local community, and vice versa, and thus all the research participants together can engage in a more broader and thorough praxis on their reality.

Another challenge is presented when considering the probable unequal starting positions of the research with either the outside researcher(s) or the oppressed community members being on the authoritarian position. First of all, overcoming the initial tensions naturally proposes a challenge to both the outside researcher(s) as well as the community members. Secondly, a further risk of establishing distorted patterns of PAR can be recognised in the easiness of slipping to unbalanced power relations (Pontes Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 165). Seeing from the researcher's point of view, for instance, their status as an authority and expert would most likely place them in a less complex position and it would therefore enable the research to progress in the most straight-forward manner. This, however, is not the aim of PAR, and resorting to the abuse of power relations results in the research turning into something else than PAR. As discussed before, PAR indeed does ask a great deal of commitment and time from its participants, and if they cannot fully dedicate themselves to the project, it will inevitably become an obstacle to conducting participatory action research.

Koirala-Azad and Fuentes (2009-2010, p. 3), while referring to Maguire (1987), in fact, list the issues of time and commitment as some of the weak points of PAR. They make a relevant observation by detecting that already the relationship and trust building between the community and the researcher(s) takes a considerable amount of time, and only after the passing of this initial stage, the research project itself can be considered: that is, naming the reality and its challenges, engaging in authentic dialogue and reflection about the reality, and eventually acting towards emancipation. Due to external demands, however, time and other necessary resources are in the risk of running out during such a long process. Furthermore, the researcher may face challenges when working together with a community that shows little dedication to power sharing and taking part in democratic processes (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009-2010, p. 3). To begin with, the researcher should remind themselves that PAR cannot be forced, and therefore PAR might not be the most suitable project to undertake with a community that is not committed to taking actions. However, if the unwillingness results from disbelief in democracy, e.g. because of the community's marginalised position in the society, reflecting on power relations could potentially provide a solution for vanquishing the existing restrictions of disempowerment.

Cahill (2007, pp. 286-287) voices a worry that PAR is only a separate space for developing critical thinking and questioning the social structures that oppress the community. By being separate, Cahill (*ibid.*) implies that PAR is not connected to the reality, and therefore has no effect on the reality. The author offers two contradictory responses to the critique. According to the first, PAR must not be seen as a separate unit, but it is necessary to recognise the broader social, cultural, and political context in which the process is taking place. The second response, however, argues that PAR and the reality indeed are separate spaces. As the boundaries between the inside and outside of PAR are rather unclear, the hegemonic relations can push in on the PAR space, and similarly the participatory relations can push out on the reality and thus contribute to changing the reality. While we acknowledge the reasoning behind the second response, we prefer the idea presented in the first one, because we are reluctant to perceive PAR and the reality as separate entities, considering that the starting point of PAR is always the local reality.

As the last piece of critique toward PAR, Maguire (as cited in Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009-2010, p. 3) highlights the bias among PAR researchers who tend to imply that PAR is the only method that has the potential to lead to social change. As stated before, in this thesis, our intention is to propose PAR as a potential method for moving from the theories to a practical level. We, however, do not intend to claim that PAR is the only way to reach emancipation and long-lasting changes in the society. Instead, we recognise that there are plenty of other approaches which all have their benefits as well as challenges in their attempts to navigate towards social transformation. Through research we have adopted PAR as the method to be discussed and recommended in this thesis as we have found it to hold a great deal of potential in terms of empowerment, emancipation, and praxis.

Lastly, as one of our aims in this thesis is to propose how to move from theory to practical level, the relevant question of ‘how to do PAR in practice’ should be addressed. PAR is a messy approach, which means that there are no step-by-step guidelines for conducting PAR, but rather a set of ingredients that together with an unforeseeable collection of spices form a unique blending for each PAR process. Generally, it can be argued that the first steps in a PAR process include establishing relationships, building a bond and feelings of mutual trust between the outside researcher(s) and the community, and after that naming

the reality and identifying the restricting structures that oppress the community. What happens after that, however, depends entirely on the community's needs. A PAR process cannot be planned beforehand, because it is the local participants who voice their concerns about their reality and thus guide the course of the research process. PAR is, therefore, planned as it goes, and instead of being paralysed by its complexity, the outside researcher, if being the one to initiate the project, as well as the other research participants, have to accept and cherish the unstructured nature of PAR and the possibilities it gives in fighting against oppression.

## 5. RELIABILITY, ETHICS AND VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

The position of the researcher is maybe more important in hermeneutics than in many other research methods. As stated earlier, it is an essential part, if not the very essence, of hermeneutics to recognise that it is a method meant for *interpretation* of the text rather than presenting one's findings as absolute truths. Thus it becomes crucial that the researcher(s) clearly state their own position and make their own bias as clear and visible as possible. (Patton, 2002, p. 115.) Similarly, it is essential to acknowledge that as researchers using hermeneutical approach we must be aware of the fact that our position as researchers necessarily influences our interpretation of the topics that are studied (Eichelberger, 1989, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 115). Therefore we must also state as clearly as possible both our starting positions regarding this study as well as how the research itself has guided our aims and the interpretations of the literature we have studied.

A major bias that cannot and, indeed, should not be forgotten, and that is especially relevant in this thesis, is naturally our own background as researchers with Western origins. In our Bachelor's thesis, at the very heart of our research was a community in rural Northern Thailand, a culture very different to our own. Furthermore, one of the main inspirations and indeed research interests in this thesis is the work of Paulo Freire and especially his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written in the Brazilian context in the 1960s. Therefore it is essential to acknowledge that our background shapes our research findings in a manner that would most probably be different to that of someone being either of hill tribe origins or a Brazilian peasant in the 1960s, or of someone from an altogether different cultural background. We have done our best to avoid bias that would stem from a Eurocentric or otherwise ethnocentric mind-set but at the same time we acknowledge the fact that it is impossible for us to claim that we would be free from that bias altogether. Although we intend to ignore the potential biases, we cannot dismiss the cultural background we have been brought up in, that for both of us is Northern Europe, Finland to be specific. What we can affect, however, is how we choose to view that bias.

Consequently, in this thesis, we have chosen to utilise Fine's (2008) idea of *strong objectivity*, which we referred to in chapter 4.2.3., and fully acknowledge our background, and instead of denying it, pay very close attention to it and with constant reflection set aside the major traces of Eurocentric thinking from this thesis, unless it agrees with what our foci of interest indicates. We wish to emphasise that our intention is not to polarise different worldviews, but rather to recognise their presence as well as the fact that they not only differ from one another but also overlap with each other. At the same time, we must be aware of the fact that it is not possible for anyone to conduct an entirely objective research and that it would be naïve to claim so.

As stated earlier in this thesis, our research journey begun as we conducted a teaching practice in an NGO in rural Northern Thailand among a group of discriminated young girls. The things we saw and experienced there gave us the initial spark to start researching topics related to discrimination and empowerment. We saw situations and destinies that we found to be extremely unfair, and that provoked rather passionate emotional reactions in us. Thus it must be admitted that behind our Bachelor's thesis is initially a strong emotional tie with our first-hand empirical accounts which inevitably shape the way we interpret themes such as power, empowerment, and emancipation in our Master's thesis as well. True to the hermeneutic circle, however, our ideas concerning certain themes have developed, altered even, while taking the research into more depth as well as a more theoretical direction in this thesis. Thus it could be said that the circle has taken us from the starting point of strong emotions and less objectivity to a more scholarly direction with more analytical and philosophical research and analysis on our topic.

As discussed earlier, one cannot avoid having a power relationship when there are two or more people in communication with each other, which reminds us of the discussion on how and for what purpose power is used. As we are discussing massive philosophic themes such as power, oppression, and emancipation, we cannot avoid discussing our own status and place in the research hierarchy, as well as our research aims, and how they affect our reliability as researchers. Therefore it must be stated that already in our Bachelor's thesis we were researching the oppressive situation of the hill tribe girls from our own pre-conceptual viewpoint. Firstly, we were the girls' teachers, which indicates that there was

an established power relation already in the teacher-pupil setting. Secondly, we conducted research on the situation of the girls without the actual involvement of the girls themselves. Should we work on the Bachelor's thesis after the study we have conducted for this thesis, we would surely use a method that was closer to PAR and therefore more extensively based on communal knowledge as well as mutual research and efforts carried out by both the researcher(s) and the community. Furthermore, we would spend a considerably longer period of time with the girls to better understand their situation, as well as to inquire whether there was a will to conduct emancipatory research in the first place and to see how it should be done. This is, however, something that we have only realised while conducting this Master's thesis, as we have moved downward on the spiral of the hermeneutic circle.

We are also aware of our somewhat privileged position as researchers working in a relatively egalitarian society where our research has not been restricted by political forces, for instance. Therefore we find it important to recognise that in most cases it would probably be impossible for the oppressed to produce a research with an approach as critical towards the society as ours. However, along the lines of PAR, it is impossible for us to claim that we would have a complete understanding of the situation of the oppressed and that we could thus make valid claims of what they should or should not do. All we can do is to try to conduct as much research as possible on what they are possibly going through and attempt to construct as solid an image about their current realities as is possible in the first place. However, we must admit, as already stated in the section discussing PAR, that the most authentic analysis and true praxis on their situation stems from the oppressed themselves. Therefore, the purpose of this study is rather to theorise and suggest than to produce a fitted and polished plan for action that can be directly applied to any situation in an oppressed community.

One of the major issues to question while conducting a study such as ours is naturally the literary sources that are used as references and the way in which we have chosen to use them. Our main sources for this thesis include scholars such as Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas, among other perhaps less iconic thinkers. There are naturally an imminent amount of scholarly sources one could use for a thesis that concerns as vast and popular concepts as power, emancipation, and praxis. However, we decided to focus on the ones

that seemed the most relevant for our study and who in their respective fields were the ones that several scholars seem to derive their ideas from. The names mentioned in this chapter are perhaps the ones considered being among the most influential in their area of study, and who can have said to have a great effect on the work of other scholars.

While discussing the central concepts presented in this thesis, we have aimed at considering them from several angles in order to gain a comprehensive idea of the essence of the theories. While it has become clear that we favour emancipation over empowerment as a meaningful direction for the oppressed to take, we have not become oblivious to the shortcomings of emancipation, either. While processing each of the key concepts, we have included the critical voices as well as those of more appreciative kind. Similarly, we have taken our own conceptions gained through previous study under harsh inspections and come to understand the hermeneutic circle and its influence in our research. Accordingly, we have come to recognise the need for constant self-criticality as well as the fact that one can never find the absolute truth about as abstract concepts as power, empowerment, or emancipation.

As stated earlier in this thesis when examining power, we concluded that whoever addresses questions on power, or anything for that matter, is always making choices concerning what they say or leave unsaid and are thus using their power to persuade the reader to agree with them. Thus it must be acknowledged that all knowledge is to a certain degree subjective and that it is impossible to reach a completely objective statement concerning the research questions. (Ricken, 2006, p. 542.) Consequently, it would be unreasonable of us to claim that we have reached ‘the final conclusion’ about these concepts and can claim them as truths. However, we argue that through this thorough and versatile study we have managed to grasp a rather realistic view on the different perspectives on these ideas and based on that view began to formulate our own conceptions of power, empowerment, and emancipation, as well as of praxis and PAR that take the abovementioned theories to a more practical level.



Concerning the validity of this thesis, we must of course address the questions such as the relevance of this study for other research as well as its originality. We believe that while we are not the first ones to discuss this issue, we have surely brought our own, fresh perspective into the discussion, since we have used the context of our Bachelor's thesis, namely that of the discriminated hill tribe girls in Thailand whose situation we became familiar with, as the experience that gave a start to this research process. We also agree with the scholars analysing hermeneutics as well as those studying power and PAR have stated: every person constructs their own truth. Yet, we see that at least partial collective truth exists, the essence of which we hope to have grasped regarding the reality of the oppressed. Moreover, we argue that we have managed to begin to construct our own 'truths' concerning theories of power, empowerment, and emancipation, and come to a relevant conclusion that suggests praxis and PAR as valid continuum to our research.

Furthermore, we believe that it has been essential that we have taken the study of power into our thesis as it has provided us with whole new ideas on how oppression and empowerment should be viewed, as well as the introduction of entirely new concepts such as emancipation, praxis and PAR. We declare that this research process has, in fact, opened our eyes to a whole new understanding of the entire society and the way it functions. Therefore, we argue that this thesis can work as a meaningful introduction to the aforementioned concepts. Along the lines of Fine's (2008) definition of *provocative generalisability*, which we discussed earlier in chapter 4.2.3., we provide food for thought for anyone considering the conduction of research among a group of oppressed people as well as for people generally interested in the situation of the oppressed.

## 6. DISCUSSION

In this thesis we raised the question of what the relationship between power, empowerment, and emancipation is, and how these concepts can be taken to an empirical level with praxis and PAR. We began this study by describing the research method we have chosen for this study, namely hermeneutics, and its history as well as practical implications. Furthermore, we illustrated the reasons why we believe that hermeneutics is the optimal research method for the purposes of this thesis. We then moved on to presenting the foundation on which we have based our research, namely the research journey that has taken us from rural Northern Thailand in 2010 to the final pages of this Master's thesis a few years later. In Chapter 3 we embarked upon the actual research questions, defined in the introductory part of the thesis, by beginning with a description of the findings originally presented in our Bachelor's thesis. Based on this we ventured into examining theories of power, empowerment, and emancipation and aimed at describing not only some of the major themes and ideas concerning these concepts but also their interrelatedness.

During the discussion between the concepts we began to understand the vastness of the fields concerning each theory and how blurred the distinctions between conceptions are. From theories of power we moved onto analysing and interpreting theories of empowerment and how it relates to power. In this thesis we chose to view the problems of the oppressed from a more global and political viewpoint, which brought to our attention the limitations of empowerment in that approach. We came to the conclusion that for the purposes of this thesis, empowerment is too limited because according to our interpretation it aims more at individual gains while still working within the system. Instead of the kind of framework provided by empowerment, we were looking for a theory that would have its aim more at social change and actually challenging the prevailing status quo. Consequently, we decided to turn our eyes on emancipation, a term and theory that seemed

to suit the needs of the oppressed in a more holistic way. Similarly to the discussion on empowerment, we also emphasised the importance of paying attention to power relations in emancipatory processes and how they affect the actions of individuals. Moreover, we argued that one of the most critical elements of successful emancipation is that it stems from the community itself, not from an outsider who ‘liberates’ the oppressed.

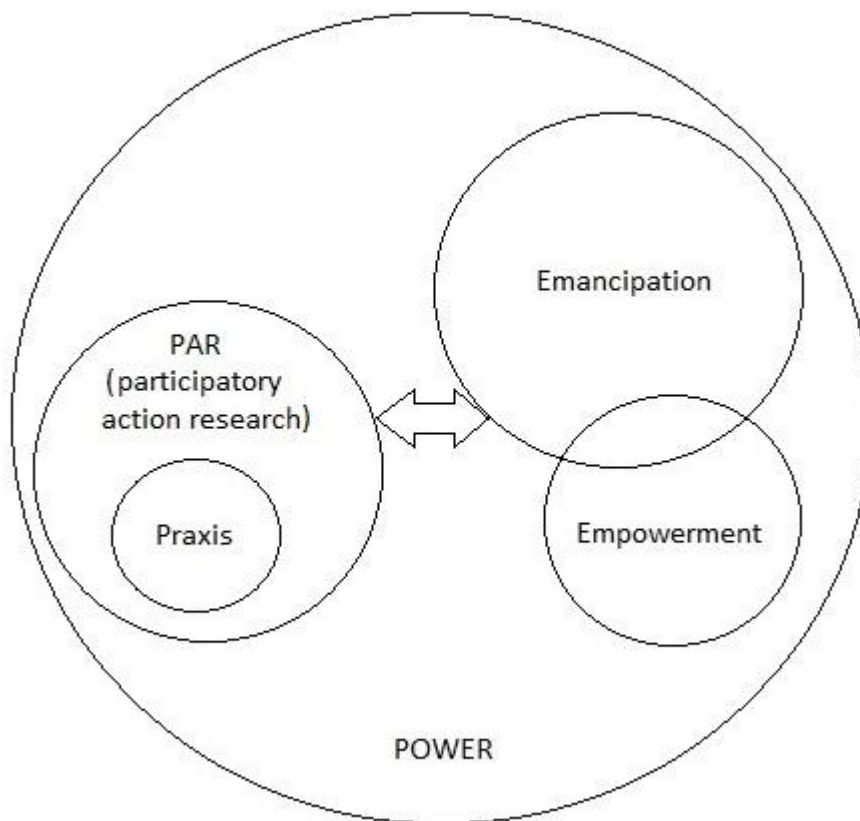
In Chapter 4, we proposed that the theories discussed in Chapter 3 can potentially be taken to an empirical level with praxis that is practiced through participatory action research. We adopted the Freirean view of praxis and, to put it shortly, defined it as the non-hierarchical union of theory and action. Although a balance between the two is difficult to reach, Freire (1996) claims that inability to find that balance results in losing the notion of true praxis. By engaging in praxis, one engages in sincere dialogue with others and attempts to reflect and act upon the oppressive reality by restoring social justice to the oppressive society, while at the same time realising that a society is in fact never complete, but that praxis encourages constant reflection and action on the current practises. In order to suggest concrete actions that can be taken when aiming at social change, we moved on to participatory action research, which we defined as a social and fundamentally community-based and -oriented process that has the concept of praxis in its core. We identified several key characteristics of PAR, but also concluded that PAR as such, as a theoretical framework, cannot be directly applied to any (oppressive) situation, but that the entire process has to be modified and planned together with the participating community to fit their reality and their call for social change.

We have created the figure below (Figure 1) to illustrate our research findings and to clarify the relations between the concepts introduced in the text. The figure illuminates how power is omnipresent, and in fact penetrates all of the concepts we have considered in this thesis, affecting their relations. Furthermore, empowerment and emancipation are closely linked terms that we differentiated by stating that while empowerment, i.e. finding one’s self-worth within the system, is a valuable goal, it is not enough in any society where oppression occurs, but that something more all-encompassing is required. We found emancipation to be of a more collective nature than empowerment which again more clearly indicates an individual’s process of growth, and decided to thus focus on how

emancipation and especially emancipatory research could be conducted within oppressed communities. However, we still see empowerment as an essential part of the emancipatory process, which is why it is inseparably linked to emancipation in the figure.

As has been defined in this thesis, praxis is found in the core of participatory action research, as PAR provides a platform for exercising praxis. In fact, the entire concept of PAR is based on honest dialogue between the research participants as well on as the seamless collaboration of action and reflection. The two-way arrow between PAR and emancipation (and empowerment) in the figure portrays the relationship between the PAR process and emancipation: PAR is essentially an emancipatory process, but the initiation of PAR already shows signs of emancipatory movement within the community, which is why we argue that the two reinforce each other.

Figure 1



As can be seen on the pages of this thesis, we have gone through a significant learning experience during the research process. Those changes have shaped our findings in this thesis as well as the future direction into which we wish to take our potential research at a later stage. We have come to understand that no conceptions of scholarly terms are carved in stone, but that they are in fact open to a high degree of debate and that the debate always leads one to new paths to explore. Furthermore, we have been forced to challenge our own conceptions concerning empowerment and the possibilities it offers as well as the challenges it poses. Along the course of the hermeneutic circle we also discovered a new concept, emancipation, that further shaped the course of our research and provided us with meaningful suggestions for taking our theoretical interpretations to an empirical level with the assistance of praxis and PAR. As it has become excruciatingly clear to us, the hermeneutic circle is never complete, and therefore we are once again faced with new questions left open in this research—new doors to be opened in future research. For instance, in this thesis we defined emancipation and social change almost as synonyms, as the main aim was not to examine the difference between the two. However, we acknowledge the simplicity of this statement and we therefore recognise that it would be relevant for us to further study the difference between emancipation and social change in the future. Moreover, as we presented praxis and PAR as tools for empirical research with emancipatory effects, the next logical step would naturally be conducting PAR within a community and thus experiment its practical usability in the chosen context, although we acknowledge that such an approach would probably face challenges in the scholarly arena in terms of resources, for instance.

With this thesis we wish to raise awareness of oppression, and to contribute to the on-going theoretical discussion on how that oppression can be overcome. Additionally, we hope that as a result of this research process, our potential future endeavours—be it our professional or private lives—will be guided by the principles of praxis: action hand in hand with reflection.

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